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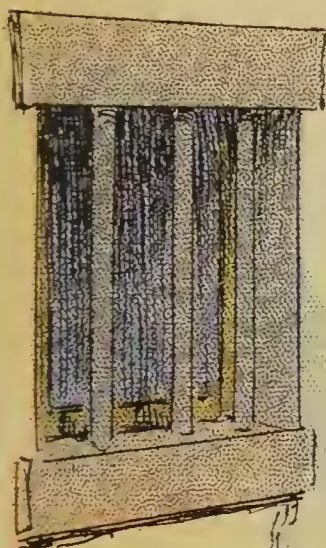
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WILD WEST WEEKLY.

YOUNG WILD WEST.

RUNNING THE RANCH.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Arietta pulled up the ladder just as the villains reached the side of the building. Baffled, they uttered cries of rage. It was at that moment that Young Wild West came galloping upon the scene.

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WILLIAM C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

W. C. H. W.

WILD WEST WEEKLY

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Young Wild West Running the Ranch

OR,

ARIETTA'S GAME FIGHT

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG WILD WEST AGREES TO RUN A RANCH.

"Great grizzly bears! If it ain't Young Wild West I'm a six-legged coyote with no eyes!"

"That's right, Lively Rick. I reckon you haven't made a mistake."

Then Young Wild West, the well-known Boy Hero of the Wild West, stepped down from the porch of the hotel and gripped the hand of his old friend, Lively Rick, who owned a ranch not many miles away from the spot where they met.

Wild, as our hero was called by his friends and acquaintances, had arrived at the mining camp called Hexter about half an hour before he was greeted in a rather unexpected manner by the ranchman.

It was a very warm afternoon in the fall of the year, and while his partners were helping the two Chinamen attend to the horses, the boy had stopped in the hotel to make arrangements with the landlord.

He soon settled things to his satisfaction, and then he went out and sat upon a bench to wait for his partners to come back.

It was then that Lively Rick appeared, and hence the remarks at the opening of this story.

"How have you been, Rick?" the boy asked, as he led the way inside the low-ceilinged bar-room of the shanty hotel. "You are certainly looking fine."

"An' feelin' that way, too, Wild," was the reply. "I'm

all right, an' so is Kate an' ther children. But where's Charlie an' Jim, an' ther gals? They must sartinly be with yer."

"They are, Rick. The girls are inside, and Charlie and Jim are out seeing to the horses. Here they come now."

Sure enough, in came Cheyenne Charlie, the scout, and Jim Dart, who was a boy about the same age as Wild, by way of the back door of the building.

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed the scout, as he saw the smiling face of their old friend. "It's lively Rick, Jim."

"That's right, Charlie," Dart answered, not showing much surprise, for that was his way. Jim Dart was one of the sort who are never surprised much at anything.

"You're good fer sore eyes, both of yer," declared Lively Rick, as he shook hands with each in turn. "Now, then, I reckon we'll have somethin'. I don't drink much since I've married an' settled down; but I reckon a little pizen won't hurt me now. I'm sartin Kate wouldn't say a word agin it if she was here."

"Well, blame if I don't take a little pizen along with yer, Rick," Cheyenne Charlie declared. "I'm a whole lot like you—I don't drink much since I hitched up with Anna. But a little good, old tanglefoot won't hurt a feller once in a while, an' I know it. With Wild an' Jim it's different. They've never tasted ther stuff, an' if they take my advice they never will, either. Me an' you was brought up ter believe that a galoot what couldn't drink liquor never amounted ter anything; an' that's why we took ter it, ther same as a duck takes to ther water."

"Right yer are, Charlie," and the ranchman grinned and nodded his head.

Jerry Holt, the proprietor of the Hexter Inn, smiled and set out a bottle and a couple of glasses.

Then he looked at the two boys of the party inquiringly.

"Soda pop, I s'pose?" he queried.

"Yes, anything in that line," Wild answered.

"Well, I reckon I kin fix yer up all right. Here yer are, boys."

As they were waiting for the drinks to be fixed up a foot-fall sounded in the back room.

"Me likee havee lillee dlop of tanglefoot," a voice called out, and then Hop Wah, Young Wild West's clever Chinese, appeared.

"Jest in time, Hop," Lively Rick exclaimed, stepping toward him with outstretched hand. "How are yer, old feller?"

"Me allee samee velly muchee finee, Misler Lick," the Chinaman retorted, as he shook the ranchman's hand warmly. "Me no thlinkee me findee you here, so be."

"An' I didn't think I'd find you here. Ha, ha, ha! This seems like old times, blamed if it don't!"

"Lat light, Misler Lick," and the Chinaman smiled affably. "How evelybody homee? You lillee babies allee light?"

"You bet they are. Growin' like weeds, top," the ranchman declared. "But come on, Hop. I reckon you're goin' ter git your tanglefoot."

"Yer might know that heathen galoot would come around in time," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, grinning broadly. "He never gits left when there's any tanglefoot around."

"Misler Charlie allee samee likee tanglefoot, too, so be," retorted Hop, as he calmly poured out his drink.

The scout was about to say something in reply when Wild touched him on the arm and said:

"There, Charlie. There's no use in getting into a wrangle with Hop just now. Let it go at that."

"Jest as you say, Wild."

After Lively Rick had settled the bill Young Wild West bought some cigars, and they went out on the hotel porch.

"I never expected to meet ther Champion Deadshot of ther West when I come up this way," Rick declared, as he patted the Boy Hero of the West fondly on the shoulder. "How long are yer goin' ter stay, Wild?"

"Well, I don't know about that," was the reply. "You see, we had an idea of dropping around on your ranch and staying there for a few days."

"Good! But say, yer couldn't make it two weeks, could yer?"

"Two weeks! Why, we would get so tired of hanging around and doing nothing in that time that we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves, Rick."

"But look here," and the ranchman's face assumed a serious look, "me an' Kate has got ter go away on business, an' we'll be gone two weeks. We've got ter go to Carson City, 'cause we've got word that Kate's uncle died not long ago, an' that there's a whole lot of money waiting her there. She's got to come an' prove who she is, an' then she gits ther money. Now, then, ther worst thing about it all is that we can't git nobody ter run ther ranch for us while we are gone. Wild, if you could possibly do it, I'd like you an' your pards an' ther gals an' Chinamen to stay there an' run things, an' give us a chance ter go an' git that pile of money."

"Well, Rick, you can bet all you're worth that we'll do it."

"Do yer mean that, Wild?"

"I certainly do. You ought to know that I never say anything I don't mean."

"Jumpin' catamounts! Shake hands on that. Whoopee, whoopee! Wow! I reckon I'm ther happiest galoot in all Arizona."

The yell Lively Rick let out must have been heard plainly inside, for the next minute the door opened, and out came the three girls belonging to Young Wild West's party.

They were Arietta Murdock, the young deadshot's sweetheart, Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie, and Eloise Gardner, Jim Dart's sweetheart.

They all knew Lively Rick, for they had lived near him in Weston, Dakota, for quite a long time, and the greeting they gave him showed how well they thought of him.

"Well, well! It don't seem possible!" the ranchman declared, the tears showing in his eyes. "Jest to think that I would run across you folks when I come ter Hexter. Why, I never had ther least idea of it. I come up this way ter try and find a good, reliable man who would take charge of my ranch while Kate an' me went away for about two weeks, an' here I am talkin' ter Young Wild West an' his friends. It don't seem possible, that's a fact."

The conversation went on rapidly after that, and at the end of fifteen minutes the girls knew all about Nevada Kate, as the wife of the ranchman had been called before she was married, and the children's health and happiness.

Then Wild told them that he had consented to take charge of Lively Rick's ranch for two weeks.

This pleased the girls greatly, for they were never happier than when they were stopping at a good, old-fashioned ranch.

But it happened that the ranch was about forty miles from Hexter, so our hero did not think of riding over there that day.

The pack-horses that carried their camping outfit could not go so very fast, so he assured the ranchman that they would leave the first thing in the morning and head for the ranch.

"Well, I'll wait here an' go with yer," Lively Rick declared. "I told Kate that I wouldn't be home afore tomorrow, anyhow."

"Good! I reckon we'll manage to run things for you while you are away, Rick."

"If anybody in ther world kin do it, you kin, Wild."

While our friends were yet conversing with Lively Rick the bell rang for supper.

The time had passed quickly since the ranchman's arrival, but they were all pretty hungry, so it was not an unwelcome sound.

Lively Rick went in with them, and it was a jolly time they had at the table, as there happened to be no other guests at the hotel just then.

"Now, then," said the ranchman, as he lighted a cigar and arose from the table, "I reckon we'll go out in ther bar-room an' git ther Chinaman ter make a little fun for us. Kin Hop perform his magic tricks as good as he used ter?"

"Oh, yes," Young Wild West answered. "Hop keeps just about the same in that line. He's just as full of fun

as ever, too, and the way he surprises professional gamblers when he plays draw poker with them is really astonishing to behold."

"Well, he sartinly is ther most wonderful Chinee that ever was," declared Rick. "There couldn't be another one like him, 'cause that would be impossible."

"Well, I will say that I never saw one that could half come up to him," the young deadshot declared.

Leaving the girls in the little parlor of the shanty hotel, our hero and his partners went out into the big bar-room with Lively Rick.

Several miners were gathered there now, since it was long past quitting time, and when they saw the party come through from the dining-room of the establishment they looked at them in a rather critical way.

The fact was that Wild and his partners were attired in rather fancy hunting suits of buckskin, and they looked a little more than above the ordinary people who put up at the hotel.

There was a dashing way about the boy leader of the party that was bound to attract the attention of the ordinary observer.

Handsome, athletic, and with an ease and grace about him that was unsurpassed, Young Wild West made a pleasing picture as he walked carelessly into the room just then.

None of those present had seen the arrival of our friends, so this was the first time they had the pleasure of meeting Young Wild West and his partners.

But it had been given out by Jerry, the proprietor of the hotel, that the boy who had won the title of Champion Deadshot of the West was a guest there.

"Good-evening, everybody," said Wild, in his cool and easy way, as he walked carelessly across the room and looked out the open doorway.

"Good-evenin', Young Wild West," came from the lips of several.

Then a man, who had anything but a prepossessing countenance, blurted out:

"So you're Young Wild West, eh, young feller?"

"That's right," and Wild turned quickly and sized him up with a critical eye.

"Well, I've often heard of yer, but I never knowed that you was as young as all this. I had an idea that you must be around twenty-five, at least. But you're only a boy, it seems."

"That's right, stranger. But I can't help that. Probably I'll be a man some day."

"Oh, yes, if yer don't happen ter die afore yer git old enough," and the man laughed in a sarcastic way.

"Well, I never think about dying," and the boy kept his eyes fixed upon the man's face, for he had come to the conclusion that the fellow was one of the so-called "bad men" that are invariably found at mining camps, or were at the time of which we write, anyhow.

"You don't know who I am, do yer?" the man asked, as he threw out his chest and put on an air of importance.

"No, I can't say that I have ever met you before."

"Well, I'm Red Randy, an' I've got ther name of bein' a mighty bad galoot sometimes."

"I'm glad to hear that, Red Randy. I am always pleased to meet very bad galoots, you know."

The smile on the boy's face as he said this nettled Red

Randy, as he called himself, somewhat, and his eyes flashed in what might be called a dangerous manner.

"What do yer mean by sayin' that?" he asked.

"Just what I said. I am sure you could take no offence at it. Didn't you say that you was a bad galoot sometimes?"

"That's what I said, Young Wild West."

"Well, I said I was always glad to meet bad galoots. I am sure there is nothing wrong about that."

"Well, you said it in a way that makes me think that yer didn't give a blame for me."

"Well, let it go at that, then."

"No, I won't. If you said it for to sorter make me look small afore ther crowd I reckon you had better 'pologize."

"See here, my friend," said Wild, as he laid his left hand upon the man's shoulder and looked him squarely in the eyes, "I didn't come in here to get into trouble. Now, let this thing drop. You're all right, as far as I know, and I don't want you to think that I meant to insult you."

"Huh!" and Red Randy brushed the hand from his shoulder and stepped back. "I've heard say that you kin lick men old enough ter be your father, no matter how big they are, either. Is that right, Young Wild West?"

"Now, see here," and the young deadshot's eyes flashed. "It strikes me that you are trying to pick a row with me. If I should say yes in answer to your question you would challenge me right away, wouldn't you?"

"I reckon I would," was the bold retort.

"Well, then, I will say yes, and I'll go further by saying that I think I can thrash you in about two minutes. Now, then, since you are looking for it, put up your hands."

Exclamations of surprise went up from the miners standing about.

"Whoopee, whoopee!" yelled Lively Rick, as he pounded the bar hard with his fist. "I reckon you have barked up ther wrong tree this time, Red Randy. Young Wild West is a regular cyclone when he gits started. I've been tryin' ter git your eye all ther time you was talkin' ter give you ther wink ter let it drop, but I couldn't do it. Now then, I s'pose you have got ter take your medicine."

"There ain't no one in this crowd as kin make me take my medicine," was the retort.

"Never mind about that," spoke up Wild, coolly. "You want to fight me, so go ahead."

"Aw, shut up," and with that the big ruffian aimed a blow with his open hand at the boy's face.

Then it was that something happened that fairly took the breath away from the bystanders.

Young Wild West easily dodged the blow, and his right fist shot out and caught Red Randy on the short ribs, sending him to the floor in a heap.

"There you are, you big bluffer! Now, then, if you feel like thrashing me, get up and try it. I'll soon show you that I will make you take your medicine, and in the proper dose, too, even if I am nothing but a boy!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RIFLE SHOT.

Red Randy was so dazed by the blow he had received that it was several seconds before he undertook to rise.

When he assumed a sitting posture he looked around him and blinked like an owl in the sun.

It was quite evident that the words of Young Wild West had been entirely lost upon him.

But he no doubt realized that something had happened to him, and he was trying hard to collect his scattered senses.

It must have been that he caught sight of the grinning faces of the men standing about, and that this brought him fully to his senses, for with a growl like that of an angry bear he leaped to his feet.

Before him stood the boy he had so cleverly knocked down.

There was the vestige of a smile on our hero's face, and his eyes were fixed upon those of his big opponent.

"Are you going to fight it out, you big duffer?" he asked coolly. "If you are, light into me."

The big ruffian's feet fairly twitched, showing that he was gathering all his strength for a desperate plunge, and then he lunged forward and attempted to grab the boy with both hands.

But Young Wild West was not to be caught that way.

If the man once got hold of him he knew he would stand no show, so it was his intention to keep clear of him, and he did so, too.

So great was Red Randy's impetus as he missed the boy that he ran fairly against the little bar before he could check himself.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cheyenne Charlie derisively. "Ther big galoot is about as quick as a grizzly I reckon. Jest look at him. He couldn't lay hands on Wild if he was ter try it a thousand times. Watch him, boys, an' see him go down again."

Taunted to desperation, the big ruffian made a grab for his gun.

"Hold on there," called out Young Wild West, sharply, and then as quick as a flash his own revolver was in his hand and leveled straight at the man's breast.

Red Randy saw it as plainly as did any of the rest.

He relinquished his hold upon the gun in a twinkling.

"If you want to fight that way, you big bluffer, we'll go outside," said the boy in his cool and easy way. "I would just as leave have it out with guns as any other way."

So enraged was the big fellow that he now lost all control of himself, and once more he sprang forward to grasp the agile boy.

Biff!

Wild's right fist shot out as he sidestepped, and the blow landed squarely upon his ribs again.

A gasp came from the man's lips, and down he went for the second time.

"I told yer so!" cried Cheyenne Charlie, swinging his hat over his head. "That boy kin do that very thing to anyone he takes a notion ter try it on. There ain't no man livin' as kin stand up afore Young Wild West."

"Whoopee, whoopee! Wow!" yelled Lively Rick, and then he caught the scout by the arms and began swinging him around in a sort of wild dance.

It was evident that the ranchman was pleased immensely at the wonderful ability his young friend had shown in mastering the bad man.

"I reckon you had better call it off, Randy," called out the owner of the Hexter Inn, as he stepped around the bar and approached the prostrate man.

"What's that?" came the gasping reply, as Red Randy's eyes turned to those of the speaker.

"I say I think you had better call it off. Young Wild West is altogether too much for yer."

"How did he knock me down like that, anyhow?" queried the man, and then by a desperate effort he rolled over and got upon his hands and knees.

"Well, Randy, he done it with his fist, I reckon. It seemed to be easy enough for him ter do it, too. He's mighty quick, an' you couldn't git hold of him in a week. I'm speakin' plain to yer, 'cause I reckon I know jest what I'm talkin' about."

"All right, I'll take your word for it, Jerry. Give me a little drop of your best brandy. I feel sorter faint like."

The proprietor now assisted him to rise, and led him to a chair.

Red Randy sat there looking at the floor, though there was much whispering and laughing going on.

But he paid no attention to that, though at any other time he would have been ready to shoot the man who laughed at his misfortune.

Jerry soon brought the liquor to him, and when he had swallowed it Red Randy seemed to feel much better, physically, anyhow.

Wild was still standing in the center of the room, for he expected the man to renew the attack.

Slowly the defeated ruffian looked around the room, and finally his eyes rested upon the young deadshot.

"Young Wild West," said he, rather bluntly, "I reckon you're too much for me."

"Well, if you think that way, we will let it drop."

"That's right; we'll let it drop—for ther time bein', anyhow."

"Oh, that's the way you feel about it, eh? Well, if you have any idea of trying it out again with me I reckon we may as well settle the business right now. Come on outside and we will see how quick you are at shooting."

But Red Randy shook his head. It was evident that he had no intention of going any further just then.

He did not offer to rise from his chair, so Wild walked over to where his partners and Lively Rick were standing.

"Gentlemen," said he, looking at the other inmates of the room, "I am very sorry this thing happened. But I will say that I am one of the sort who never stands for an insult. It don't make any difference to me whether a man is big or little. If I find that he is looking for trouble I am always ready to meet him half way. I reckon that big bluffer got a little more than he wanted. I suppose he will have it in for me from this time out. But if he knows when he is well off he will let it drop and not try to look for satisfaction. If he does look for satisfaction I assure you that I won't hesitate to drop him dead in his tracks. That's the kind of a boy I am, gentlemen."

"Hooray for Young Wild West!" shouted Lively Rick.

Then the very men who had always been more or less afraid of the bad man joined in, and the rafters of the inn fairly shook as their voices arose to the highest pitch.

When the cheering had subsided Red Randy arose and walked straight to the door.

As he was going out he turned and pointed his finger at Wild, saying:

"We'll meet again some time, Young Wild West."

"All right; if we do you had better be very careful how you act," was the cool rejoinder.

The villain then muttered something that was inaudible, and started down the street.

"Velly bad man, so be," observed Hop, who had remained standing in the doorway of the dining-room while all the excitement was going on. "Me no likee him."

"Well, heathen, I reckon there ain't many as does have much love for Red Randy," a miner spoke up, nodding at Hop. "But we've always allowed that it was better to let him have his own way about things. He's mighty quick on ther shoot, an' he never would take nothin' from no one."

"Well, I reckon he took a whole lot this time," the scout spoke up, a broad grin on his tanned and weather-beaten face. "But he ain't ther first one as has ever met more than his match in Young Wild West, I kin tell yer."

"Never mind about that, Charlie," said Wild. "We'll let it drop. I reckon Red Randy isn't so dangerous as what a great many think he is. It is hardly likely he will interfere with us again to-night, and if he waits till to-morrow it will be too late, unless he should happen to follow us to the ranch."

"I wouldn't be much surprsed if he done that, Wild," said Lively Rick, shaking his head. "I know that galoot putty well. I've seen him lots of times when I've been here in Hexter, though I never got in any trouble with him. I'm like ther rest around here. I always think it's better ter let a bad man have his own way. Besides, I ain't so very much on ther shoot."

It was not long before more of the residents of the mining camp began to gather at the Hexter Inn.

As the girls were being entertained by the landlord's wife and daughter, Wild and his partners thought they may as well remain at the bar-room and take a study of things as they came before them.

Hop Wah, the clever Chinaman, seemed to be in a merry mood, and it was not long before he began to make himself conspicuous.

"Ther heathen is itchin' ter git a chance ter play a trick on somebody, Wild," said Cheyenne Charlie, after the lamps had been lighted in the building. "I kin always tell when he's up ter somethin' funny. I'll bet it won't be long before he'll be springin' one of his magic tricks."

"Well, let him go ahead, Charlie," was the reply. "I reckon he won't do any harm. Sometimes he goes a little too far, but I shall be keeping an eye on him."

It was quite evident that some of the newcomers had heard all about what had happened to Red Randy, the bad man, for they seemed to be greatly interested in watching Young Wild West.

Finally a good-natured looking miner, wearing a set of rather grizzly whiskers, nodded pleasantly to the young deadshot and said:

"I reckon you're Young Wild West."

"You reckon just right, my friend," was the reply, while a smile showed on the face of the boy, for he could readily guess that the man was one of the most prominent citizens of the place, and that he was also one of the honest and industrious sort.

"I hear that you sorter give Red Randy an overhaulin'," went on the man, as he stepped a little closer and offered his hand.

"Well, I rather think he got a little more than he expected," was the reply, as the young deadshot shook hands with him. "But it was all his own fault. I am sure I was not looking for trouble."

"I believe yer, Young Wild West. Nobody has ter look for trouble when Red Randy's around. He's always lookin' for it, an' it's mighty strange if he don't manage ter start it, if there's anyone as is willin' ter pick up anything he says or does. My name is Barrymore, an' I'm one of ther first men as struck this here camp. I'm awful glad ter shake hands with ther Champion Deadshot of ther West."

"It seems that my notoriety as a shot has reached pretty well over the country," said Wild, shaking his head. "But I am sure I never go about introducing myself as a deadshot. If it happens that I have won in the shooting-matches I have taken part in in the last two or three years it does not really mean that I am a real champion, after all. There may be many others who can shoot as well, if not better than I can."

"There may be," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, who was always ready to put in a word on an occasion of this sort, "but I reckon they ain't to be found, Wild. I've got five hundred dollars that says there never was a man livin' as kin beat youshootin' with a gun or a Winchester."

"Never mind about that, Charlie. I am not looking for a chance to get in a shooting-match, whether it is for fun or fair. I am very sorry I had any trouble with the man called Red Randy. I expected to have a peaceful stay of it here in Hexter, for the short time we intend to be here."

"All right, Wild," was the rather meek reply. "I won't say another word."

"Me likee say sometling now, so be," and Hop Wah stepped to the center of the room, bowing and smiling to the crowd that had gathered. "Me velly smartee Chinee, and me likee say me wantee showee nicee lillee tlick."

"What does he say?" questioned Jerry Holt, the proprietor of the inn, looking at our friends.

"He says he would like to show a magic trick. He's a sleight-of-hand performer, you know, and sometimes he likes to show off a bit."

"Sleight-of-hand, eh? Well, I reckon we'd all like ter see somethin' in that line, wouldn't we, boys?" and the proprietor addressed his last remark to the gathering in the room.

An affirmative answer went up from nearly everyone present, and all looked at the Chinaman with no little interest.

To them he appeared to be just a plain, ordinary Chinee, who did not possess any more brains than he actually needed to get through the world.

But that was where Hop fooled the majority of those he came in contact with.

His way of childish innocence and very ordinary appearance went for nothing, as far as his ability was concerned.

He had declared that he would like to show them a magic trick, and it certainly was now up to him to proceed.

"Go on, Hop, and show them something," said Wild, nodding to him.

"Allee light, Misler Wild," was the reply, and a smile of satisfaction showed upon the Celestial's yellow countenance.

Just what he had in mind to do our friends did not know.

They had seen him perform about every trick he was capable of, and though it was an old thing to them, they were always more or less interested in watching other spectators when anything that seemed really mystifying was shown.

"Me likee know if lere any Melican man here who no believe in magic?" Hop asked, as he looked around, still smiling in his childish way.

"I don't believe a whole lot in it," spoke up the good-natured man who had introduced himself as Barrymore. "I never seen much of it done, but I've heard others tell great things, which I never believed. What kin yer do, anyhow? They say as how a magician kin take silver dollars out of a feller's ears, an' all that."

"Lat velly hard to do, so be," and Hop shook his head, as though he had his doubts about being able to perform such a feat.

Then he stepped up a little closer, and removing the man's hat quickly, extracted a pack of cards, a pipe, and a big roll of bills from it.

Neither the money, the pipe, or pack of cards belonged to the miner, but those who had witnessed the performance were ready to make an affidavit that they had certainly been taken from the hat.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Barrymore, looking very much surprised. "That's mighty funny, ain't it? I never knowed I had that money in my hat."

Then he laughed heartily and shook his head, showing that he took it as a joke.

Hop opened the roll of bills and showed that there was quite an amount of money in it.

Some of the bills were fifties, while the rest were twenties, tens and fives.

He soon showed all hands the money, and then he appeared to place it in his mouth and swallow it, giving a choking gasp as it was supposed to go down into his stomach.

"Lat money allee samee be safe now," he declared. "Me takee lillie dlink to swallee down."

"You'll drink on me, heathen," declared Barrymore. "Jerry, give him ther best in ther house."

As Hop had a fondness for tanglefoot, as he called the liquor sold in such places, he lost no time in getting his drink.

Then he produced a tobacco pouch, and proceeded to fill the pipe he had appeared to take from the miner's hat.

The pack of cards he placed upon the bar, and then covered it with the hat.

While he was doing this in plain view of the miners he was also doing something else that they did not see.

The bar was of rough boards, and along the outside edge of it was a strip of pine, as though for the purpose of keeping dice or money from rolling to the floor.

Close to this strip the Chinaman had sprinkled a train of powder, as the bar happened to be dry just then.

The powder extended under the hat, where a good-sized cracker had been placed unobserved by him, though everyone thought the pack of cards was there.

"Come here, Misler Lick," said Hop, bowing to his

friend, the ranchman. "Me wantee you helpee me, so be."

"All right, Hop," was the reply. "You kin bet your life I'm always ready ter help yer, though I know you're mighty foxy, an' ther first thing I know I'll be havin' somethin' happen ter me that will make everybody laugh. But it's all right. I'm a good-natured galoot. Whoopee, whoopee!"

Lively Rick promptly made his way to his side, and then Hop finished filling the pipe from the tobacco pouch.

"You havee lillie smokee, Misler Lick?" he said, as he handed the pipe to him.

"Well, I don't know about that," and Lively Rick shook his head and grinned. "I remember the last time I took a cigar from you it blowed ter pieces right in my mouth. They ain't no powder in ther pipe, is there?"

Hop declared that he was surprised to think that Lively Rick should have that opinion of him, so the ranchman struck a match and promptly lighted the pipe.

Hop produced a cigar and proceeded to light it, at the same time saying:

"Evelybody watchee um' hat."

All eyes were turned upon it instantly, and the next instant the flame of the match was applied to the train of powder that ran along the edge of the bar.

There was a sharp hiss, and then what seemed to be a fiery snake shot toward the hat.

Then there was a sharp report, and the hat flew to the ceiling.

Almost at the same moment a stream of blue fire shot from the pipe Lively Rick had in his mouth.

Some of the men were so much surprised that they drew back in alarm, but others realized that it was nothing but a joke and laughed heartily.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Barrymore, as he picked up his smoking hat after it had landed upon the floor. "I reckon that pack of cards must have exploded, boys!"

Then everybody began laughing, and while the merriment was at its height, a rifle shot sounded from the outside, and Young Wild West clapped his hand to the side of his head.

CHAPTER III.

HOP SHOWS MORE OF HIS CLEVERNESS.

The shot had come through a window that was at the end of the bar, and the bullet had clipped a lock of hair from our hero's head.

The boy knew right away who must have fired it.

It could be no one else than Red Randy.

But instead of getting excited, as most men or boys would have done under the circumstances he raised his hand and called out:

"That's all right, gentlemen. The big bluffer made a miss of it. I lost a few strands of hair, that's all. But you can bet all you're worth I'll get him if he's anywhere in sight."

Then, revolver in hand, the young deadshot leaped across the room, and made his way outside.

It was now thoroughly dark, but the lights from the

shanties on either side of the street lighted up the scene sufficiently for him to take in a view of the near surroundings.

But not a person could be seen, though half a dozen men came running from the front of the saloon that was nearly opposite the next minute.

It was evident that they had heard the shot fired, and had come out to see what it meant.

The boy knew well the direction the shot must have been fired from, so, casting a look at the window the bullet had come through, he started across the street.

It happened that there was a vacant space of ground there that was partly covered by a growth of bushes, and without the least sign of fear or hesitation he bounded straight into the bushes.

But there was no one there.

As he came to a halt and listened he heard the sounds of the direction his assailant was going.

After him went the boy, bent on catching sight of him and bringing him to the ground by a bullet.

But he had not proceeded very far when he came to a place that was rocky, and where clumps of bushes were to be seen on every hand.

Then he came to a halt, knowing that it would be useless for him to attempt to find Red Randy in the darkness.

If he continued the search the man might shoot him down from behind some rock or bush, too, so he decided to go back to the inn and make as light of it as possible.

But at the same time he was going to keep his eyes and ears open, and at the first sight of the scoundrel he would assert himself in the true fashion that was coming to him.

As he reached the street he found a big crowd there, and everybody seemed to be talking about the mysterious shot in the darkness.

"Take it easy, gentlemen," he called out. "The big bluffer is off there hiding somewhere. I heard his footsteps as he was running away. He had not the courage to even fire another shot, though he must have seen me coming. But it is all right. If I don't get him to-night I will some time to-morrow, if he has the nerve to stay here in the camp."

Then it was that Lively Rick proposed a cheer for the young deadshot, and the way the excited miners yelled told plainly how much they appreciated his presence in the mining camp.

When Wild returned to the Hexter Inn he was followed by a crowd that fairly packed the place.

No one as yet had offered to suggest the name of Red Randy in connection of the affair, and after he heard them talking for a minute or two the boy held up his hand and called out:

"Gentlemen, I suppose there are many of you who have an idea who it was who fired a shot through the window. I know who it was just as well as if I had seen him. It was Red Randy, the bad man that so many of you have been afraid of for this long time."

Several of them nodded, as though they felt quite sure of it, but no one said so.

"It is hardly likely he will show up around here again to-night," went on Wild, in his cool and easy way. "But to-morrow morning I will make it my business to hunt him up. I mean to be up at daylight, and I will begin the search right away. If I happen to meet him you can bet

all you're worth that something will happen. He made an attempt on my life, and I feel it my duty to let him have it on sight. If there happens to be anyone here who is of the opinion that I am not right in what I say, let him speak out."

"You're right, Young Wild West," promptly retorted Barrymore, as he pushed his way forward and gripped the boy's hand. "There ain't a man here as what thinks yer ain't, either, though some of 'em maybe don't feel like expressin' themselves in that way. Ther fact is that Red Randy has been lordin' it over us ter such an extent that there's a good many as is really afraid of him. That's why they don't speak out what they think. As I told yer afore, Red Randy is mighty quick with a gun, an' he's always lookin' for trouble. He's shot more than one man in this here camp, an' he's got ther name of bein' a regular terror."

"Well, he will be a dead terror if I happen to set eyes on him," was the reply.

What the boy said seemed to please the crowd greatly, and then business began with a rush at the bar.

Nearly everyone present wanted Wild to drink with them, but he quietly waved them aside and told them to go ahead and enjoy themselves, if that was the way they could do it.

After a while somebody thought of the Chinaman who had been entertaining them with his magic when the shot was fired, but Hop was not in the place.

As no one had seen him leave it was impossible to guess where he was just then.

"Where kin ther heathen be, Wild?" said Cheyenne Charlie, when fifteen minutes had elapsed. "I reckon I had better go an' look for him."

"Maybe it would be a good idea, Charlie," nodded his dashing young leader.

The scout quickly left the place, and made a thorough search of the premises.

He found Wing, the cook, dozing in the room that had been allotted to him and his brother for the night, but he declared that he had not seen Hop.

He was not in the stable, nor anywhere in the big shanty that was called the inn, so Charlie, very much puzzled, at length returned to the bar-room.

"He ain't nowhere around, Wild," was his report, as he reached the side of the young deadshot. "It sorter strikes me as though he's gone ter hunt up ther galoot that fired at yer through ther window."

"Quite likely, Charlie," was the reply. "I had that notion the moment I missed him. Well, let him go. Hop is a very clever fellow, and it may be that he will be able to locate Red Randy."

Jerry's trade kept on the increase, for more men kept coming in all the time.

It seemed that everyone in the mining camp wanted to see Young Wild West.

The young deadshot took it good-naturedly, for he was so used to being made a lot of that it was an old thing, and he felt little or no pride in it.

Of course, he liked to be honored, for who does not?

That part of it was only human.

But Wild never got what is sometimes called a case of the "swelled head."

When he found anyone piling it on too thick he always advised them to desist.

This was true in the case where Barrymore, the good old citizen of Hexter, declared that he was the greatest and best fellow that ever visited the camp, or ever would, for that matter.

"Don't talk that way," the young deadshot said, shaking his head. "I don't like it. I want you all to understand that I am nothing more than a common, every-day boy. It may be that I have taken to things that others have not, and that I have become expert in them. But that does not make me great. There are plenty of boys of my age who could do the things I do if they had only taken to them and tried good and hard. Just because I have made myself somewhat of an athlete, and can shoot well, don't mean that I am any better than anyone else."

"Maybe that's right, Young Wild West," answered the miner, shaking his head. "But where is there a boy, or a man, who kin keep as cool as you do? Why, you never git rattled, no matter what happens."

"Well, I suppose I was born that way, Mr. Barrymore. But never mind about that. I reckon we'll all have a cigar now. I feel just like treating the crowd, for I never saw a finer lot of men in a mining camp than those gathered here at this minute."

"That's a compliment for yer, boys," Barrymore called out, laughingly. "I reckon every galoot will smoke now, jest 'cause Young Wild West is goin' ter take a cigar himself."

They all took the hint, and the result was that not a drink was called for, though several in the crowd never smoked cigars.

But the drinks came fast enough after that, as it happened that there were many of the miners who were flush, and they felt like spending their money.

Pretty soon Hop walked in the front door.

The Chinaman was smiling as he entered, and just as though it was his first appearance there, he bowed to the assemblage and said:

"Velly nicee evening, so be."

"Where have yer been, Hop?" Cheyenne Charlie asked, quickly.

"Me allee samee takee lillie walkee, Misler Charlie," was the reply.

"Come and have a drink, Hop," said one of the men, catching him by the sleeve. "I reckon yer must be a little dry by this time."

"Me velly muchee dly," was the reply.

Hop got a glass of his favorite beverage, and then, wiping his mouth, he stepped over to where our hero was standing.

"Well, what is it, Hop?" the boy asked, coolly.

"Me likee talkee to you, Misler Wild. You comee in um backee loom."

"All right. I knew you wanted to say something."

"Lat light, Misler Wild: me allee samee findee outee sometling."

"I was certain of it the moment you came in. You found where Red Randy went. I suppose?"

"Lat light: me allee samee findee outee where Led Landy go, Misler Wild."

The two stepped into the back room, which happened to

be empty just then, and then the clever Chinaman related how he had started to find the villain who had fired the shot through the window.

He had been lucky enough to catch sight of a man crossing the street just at the edge of the camp, and then he had worked his way stealthily along and followed him to a shanty that stood further toward the cliffs that lay back of the claims than any of the others.

"Me allee samee cleep uppee close to um shanty," he went on to say, "and len me listen. Me hear um bad man say to himself lat he flaid he no killee Young Wild West, but he be sure to gittee him to-morrow morning, so be. He talkee allee samee loud, lough he talkee to himself. He velly muchee mad. Led Landy velly bad Melican man."

"I reckon he is a pretty bad one, Hop," Wild admitted. "Well, now I know for certain who it was, and I feel all the better for it. I will look up the scoundrel the first thing in the morning."

Hop then told him the exact direction to go to find the shanty, and more than satisfied with the work the Celestial had performed, our hero went back into the bar-room.

"Come on, Hop," called out Lively Rick. "I reckon you kin show us about one more magic trick afore we go ter bed."

"Allee light, Misler Lick," Young Wild West's clever Chineese answered, for he was always willing to amuse a crowd. "Me showee sometling velly funny, so be."

"That's what we want, somethin' funny," spoke up Jerry, the proprietor of the inn.

Hop glanced at the eager faces of the miners.

He saw that they appeared to be a very good-natured lot.

"Me makee lillie fun for evelybody, so be," he thought.

"But me makee Misler Lick mad, maybe, so be."

This meant that Lively Rick was to be the victim of some sort of joke.

Hop soon moved a small round table to the center of the room.

This done he took from his pocket an egg.

It certainly looked to be just an ordinary hen's egg, but when the clever magician told them it was a rattlesnake's egg the miners looked surprised.

"That ain't no snake's egg," declared Lively Rick, as he stepped up to the table.

"You makee lillie mistakee, so be," Hop answered. "You watchee! Me allee samee makee um egg hatchee."

"I'll bet he'll do it, too!" cried Jerry, the proprietor.

"Evelybody watchee, and me showee you velly muchee quickee," said Hop.

Then he produced his yellow silk handkerchief, and placing the egg on the table, in about the center, he covered it over carefully.

When he had spread the handkerchief out well, he raised his hands and looked at the ceiling in silence for the space of half a minute.

This done, he clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"Um egg allee samee hatchee! Misler Lick, you liftee um handkelchief and you allee samee findee velly nicee lattlesnake."

"I reckon I know what I'll find," Rick answered with a grin, for he was aware that Hop had a clever rubber imitation of a rattler, and that he was able to fool the best of them with it.

He did not hesitate to lift the handkerchief, and then, when it was seen by the spectators that the egg had vanished, and that there was what appeared to be a live rattlesnake coiled on the table in place of it, everyone but the ranchman stepped back in alarm.

"I knowed it!" declared Rick, grinning at the astonished crowd. "I happened ter know he had that snake. It is one of his pets."

Hop suddenly held up the egg, which he took from his sleeve.

The majority saw it, though Rick was not one of them.

While his victim was grinning at the miners, the clever Celestial placed the egg on the chair that was directly behind him.

"You settie down, Misler Lick," Hop said cheerfully, "len me showee evelybody lat um snakee no bitee."

"Right yer are, Hop!" and the ranchman dropped into the chair immediately.

Then it was that a roar of laughter went up, for as he felt the egg break under his weight Lively Rick sprang to his feet again.

"Thunder!" he cried, as he felt the moisture striking through to his skin. "I reckon ther joke is on me, boys."

Cheyenne Charlie was so pleased at the trick that he laughed louder than any of the rest.

But Rick took it good-naturedly, and when the mixture of yolk and white had been wiped off by means of his big red cotton handkerchief he smiled, and declared that it was all right.

Hop then picked up the rubber snake, and made it wriggle as though it was really alive.

He waved it back and forth a few times, and then went through the form of swallowing it, much to the amazement of the majority of the spectators.

Lively Rick now drew his wallet and invited the crowd to partake of refreshments at his expense.

"Hop is all right," he declared. "I don't care what he does ter me. He's ther best Chinee what ever wore a pig-tail!"

That ended the fun for the evening, for since he intended to make an early start in the morning, Wild advised Hop to retire to his quarters.

But it is safe to say that the miners of Hexter would long remember Young Wild West's clever Chinee as being the best entertainer they ever had the pleasure of meeting.

CHAPTER IV.

WILD GRILLS RED RANDY.

Young Wild West was up before sunrise next morning, and he was not long in arousing his two partners.

"Boys," said he, "I reckon we'll take a little walk around the camp and try and find Red Randy. Since Hop was able to find out where he went last night, we know just where to go. The chances are that the big bluffer is still asleep."

"Most likely, Wild," Jim Dart answered, while the scout gave a nod.

"Well, come on. As soon as you wash up a little we'll strike out. I reckon we'll get back in time for breakfast."

They were not long in getting ready, and then, taking their Winchesters, they left the tavern by a rear door and followed the direction Hop had told them the shanty Red Randy entered the night before must lay.

It was on the same side of the street as the shanty hotel, so there was no necessity of them showing themselves at all.

Lively Rick had been left sleeping, but since he could be of no use to them, Wild thought it unnecessary to arouse him.

They walked along until they came to a spot where the ground was very uneven and rocky.

The claims that were worked by many of the miners lay off to the right, and beyond them tall cliffs reared themselves.

Vegetation was rather scarce at this point, but the curious-shaped rocks that reared themselves on all hands offered them all the secrecy they could wish for.

But our friends did not proceed with any caution just now, for they were satisfied that Red Randy was not up yet.

If he was he might see them coming and get in a shot at them, but since he had made a miss of it the night before Wild did not consider him to be much of a marksman, even though he was called a quick and sure shot by the miners.

The distance was not very far, and at last they came in sight of a shanty that stood further back toward the cliff than any of the rest.

According to what Hop had said, this must be the place. Seeing that the door was closed tightly, and that no smoke was coming from the chimney that was built at one end of the shanty, our three friends became satisfied that the villain certainly must still be asleep.

"Come on, boys," said Wild. "I reckon we'll go up to the shanty and give the scoundrel a surprise. I don't want either of you to fire a shot. If there is any shooting to be done I am going to do it myself. But since sleeping over it I have decided to give Red Randy a chance. I don't feel like shooting him down on sight, as I indicated I would last night. The fact is I don't consider that he has half a chance with me, since I will be ready for him."

"Jest as you say, Wild," the scout answered, shrugging his shoulders. "But you know very well ther galoot sartinly meant ter put an end to yer when he fired that shot through ther window."

"I know he did, Charlie. But if I give him a grilling, perhaps he will have a different mind. It may be that he will decide to reform from his bad ways."

"It might be, but I don't think so," and the scout again shook his head.

As they came close to the shanty they tread more softly, for they did not want to let the inmate know of their approach.

If he did happen to see them coming he would have a splendid chance to fire upon them from a window.

But not a sound was heard, and it now being quite light, Wild stepped quickly to the door and tried it.

He soon found that it was barred.

"I reckon we'll peep in the window, boys," he said, in a whisper.

Then he walked around to one of the two windows the shanty contained and pressed his face against the dusty pane of glass.

It was just light enough inside for him to see the form of a man stretched out on a bunk at the further end of the one room the shanty contained.

Though he could not see his face, Wild was confident that the sleeper was Red Randy.

"Boys," said the young deadshot, "you stay right here and watch what happens. I am going to knock upon the door."

Charlie and Jim nodded to this, and then Wild stepped around to the door, and gave a loud knock.

The sleeper heard it, and quickly sprang from the bunk.

Charlie and Jim could see him plainly, but Wild heard his movements, and knew almost what had happened as well as they did.

After a wait of about half a minute the door was opened.

There stood Red Randy, and when he saw who his early caller was his jaw dropped and his face turned deadly pale.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bad Man," said the young deadshot, in his cool and easy way. "I reckon you're not a very early riser."

"Wha—what do you want, Young Wild West?" the rufian stammered.

"Well, I thought I'd call around and see you before we left the mining camp. I just wanted to show you that you made a miss of it when you fired a shot from your rifle through the window of the inn last night. You took a few strands of hair from the side of my head, but that was all. Probably the next time you get a shot at me you will do better."

"I reckon you're mistaken in your man, Young Wild West," said the villain boldly, for he had partly recovered from his astonishment at seeing the boy at the door. "I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Why, yes, you do. I am sure it was you who fired the shot. You see, I had someone to follow you, and he heard you muttering to yourself about what you had done, and what you intended to do. There is no use in trying to deny it, Red Randy. You tried hard to kill me last night."

"Well, I might as well say that I took a shot through ther window, Young Wild West," admitted that villain, looking nervously around as though he thought someone might come to his aid. "But I didn't do it with ther intention of killin' yer. I jest wanted ter show yer how close I could come to yer without hurtin' yer."

"Oh, so that's how it is, eh?"

"Yes, that's a fact, Young Wild West. There ain't nothin' of ther murderer in me. If I'd shot yer through ther window I would sartinly be a murderer. But that's somethin' I don't never intend to be. If I can't down a man in a fair an' square way I won't down him at all."

"Well, I won't dispute what you say, though I have my opinion, of course. But since you say you just fired that shot to show me how close you could come to me without hurting me, I will do something in that line on you. Just get yourself ready, for I want you to take a walk out upon the street with me."

"I ain't goin' ter take no walk out on ther street with yer, Young Wild West. This is my shanty, an' I've got a right ter stay here as long as I want ter."

"I don't doubt that it is your shanty, Mr. Randy, but I reckon you are going to take a walk with me, and you are going to go just where I tell you to. Now, then, get a hustle on you. Put the rest of your clothes on and come on out."

As the boy said this he drew one of his revolvers and playfully pointed it at the man.

"Well, I suppose I'll have ter do jest what you say, Young Wild West," he said, his eyes flashing. "You have got me dead ter rights. I ain't ther one to fool with a galoot when he's got ther best of me."

"Well, hurry up, then."

The villain was not long in making his toilet, and then he buckled his belt about his waist and came on out of the shanty.

It was not until then that Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart showed themselves.

"Ah," said Red Randy, shaking his head and scowling. "So it took three of yer to git me out, did it?"

"Why, no," answered Wild, making out that he was surprised that the man should talk that way. "I think I did it alone, didn't I?"

"Well, yer had your two pards with you. Maybe you was afraid ter come alone."

"You don't really think that, do you, now?" and the boy smiled at him.

"Well, what did yer all come for, then?"

"Well, we certainly didn't come to kill you. Last night I felt very much like doing that, but I have slept over it, and I have come to the conclusion that you are not exactly fit to die yet. Now you come on with me, and I am going to show you how close I can come to you without hurting you. But I want others to see it. If I didn't I would do it right here. I am going to make an example of you, Red Randy, and after I am through with you if you still feel like killing me you can follow where I go and try it. But remember one thing. When I leave this mining camp it will be with the intention of never interfering with you, unless you happen to show up later on. If you do show up, and I think you are after me, I am going to put a bullet straight through your heart. You can put that down as coming straight from me. I mean every word I say."

The tone of the boy's voice was quite enough to convince anyone that he was fully determined as to what he would do. A revolver was hanging from Red Randy's belt, but he knew better than to even touch it, and without any further hesitation he started in a straight line for the single street that ran through the heart of the little mining camp.

Wild and his partners walked on behind him, and kept their eyes upon the man.

Smoke could be seen coming from the chimneys of some of the shanties now, and as they reached the little thoroughfare they saw that the general store was just being opened.

The saloon and hotel had been kept open all night, and three or four men, who must have risen rather early, were standing in front of the former.

"Where do you want me ter go?" Red Randy asked, as he came to a halt on reaching the store.

"Walk along in the middle of the street until you get in front of the saloon," Wild answered, coolly.

Without a word Red Randy started off.

His back being to them, our friends could not see the expression of his face.

But if they had seen it just then they would have found that it showed just how angry and frightened he was.

As the four walked along through the white dust that lay upon the street, more miners appeared.

All eyes were turned upon them, for there was no doubt but that they were recognized.

To see Red Randy walking along ahead of Young Wild West and his partners was quite enough to set the observers speculating.

After being told to do so, the bad man came to a halt exactly in front of the saloon.

Then he slowly turned around and faced the young deadshot and his partners.

Charlie and Jim coolly walked over and joined the small crowd that had gathered there.

"Good-morning, boys," called out one of the miners. "What's goin' on?"

"Well, gentlemen," Wild answered, in his cool and easy way, "Red Randy has admitted it was he who fired the shot at me through the window last night. He says he did it just to show me how close he could come to me without hurting me. I have my own opinion about that, of course. But when he said that it occurred to me that I would give him a little of his own medicine. I propose now to show him how close I can come to him without hurting him. When I get through with him I shall expect him to get down on his knees and promise that he will never bother me again as long as he lives."

"I never makes no promises," declared the bad man angrily, as he looked at the little crowd.

No doubt he felt that he might have some friends there who might intercede for him.

But it seemed that he was mistaken in this, for the looks he received were anything but encouraging.

Wild stepped back about ten paces from him and then, pulling one of his revolvers, he called out:

"Now, then, Red Randy, you tried your luck last night with a rifle. I am going to use a gun on you. Just stand around side to me. I noticed that scarf you have about your neck is tied rather loosely. It don't look well that way, so I will try and remove it for you."

The scarf was a bright red one, and it was tied in a loose knot that protruded a few inches from the throat of the bad man.

Red Randy looked again at the crowd in front of the saloon, but seeing that there was no sympathy there, he turned and stood as he was told.

Up went the revolver, and then as it came down to a line with the man's neckerchief, Wild pressed the trigger.

Crack!

The report rang out sharp and distinct on the morning air, and the red scarf was seen to give a twitch and flutter.

"Stand still," the boy commanded, sternly. "I reckon it is going to take more than one shot to remove that thing from your neck."

Crack!

He fired again, and this time the scarf fluttered to the ground.

The last report had scarcely sounded when several men

rushed from their shanties, hatless, and some of them half dressed.

To hear shooting so early in the morning was something unusual, and they all wanted to find out what was up.

"Hello, Young Wild West," called out Barrymore, who happened to be one of the new arrivals on the scene. "You have got your man, I see."

"That's right," was the reply. "I have got him, and I am just putting him through a course of sprouts. I have made up my mind to let him live, provided he makes a promise to never interfere with me again as long as he lives."

"Well, I reckon he'll make ther promise, all right. He knows when he's well off, even if he is a mighty bad man."

"You shet up, Barrymore," called out the villain, sharply. "You ain't got nothin' ter say about this. Maybe I'll call you to account for puttin' your ore in."

"All right, Red," the miner answered. "I have done my best ter go easy with yer for some time, but since things has gone ther way they have, I might as well have it out with yer. When Young Wild West gits through with yer you kin start in on your game. You'll find me right here. I reckon you'll know there ain't nothin' cowardly about me."

Red Randy said no more, but stood looking at Wild, waiting for him to go ahead.

The boy did not exactly know what else to do, but he was bent upon making an example of the villain, so he finally decided to shoot the buttons from his shirt sleeves.

The sleeves were not buttoned on the cuffs, nor were they rolled up, as the bad man usually had them.

He had been forced to leave the shanty in such a hurry that he had no time to exactly finish his every-day toilet.

The shirt he wore was a bright red one, and the buttons on the cuffs were big white ones.

"Hold your arms straight out, Mr. Randy," the young deadshot called out, sharply.

The command was obeyed instantly.

Then Wild drew his other revolver, and up went both weapons.

Crack, crack!

So quickly were the two shots fired that it seemed impossible for him to take aim, but both buttons flew from the sleeves of the man's shirt.

"There! I reckon that ought to be enough," said Wild, coolly, as he put the revolvers back into the holsters and stepped toward the bad man. "Now, then, are you ready to get on your knees and promise never to interfere with me again?"

The villain looked around in a hesitating sort of way. Then he brought back his fast oozing courage, and with a defiant snap of his eyes, he exclaimed:

"No! I ain't goin' ter git down on my hands an' knees, Young Wild West."

"Is that so? Well, I shall have to make you, then."

Out came one of his revolvers in a twinkling.

Crack!

He fired quickly, and the bullet hitting the villain's right boot-heel, caused him to give a leap in the air.

Crack!

The other heel got it this time, and a piece of the

leather was chipped from it, flying half across the dusty street.

"Hold on!" shouted Red Randy, showing for the first time that he was really terrified. "I'll do anything yer say."

Then he dropped upon his hands and knees.

"Ah! I thought you would come around, you big bluffer," said the boy, the smile still hovering about his lips. "Now then, go ahead."

"Young Wild West," said Red Randy, as he rose up straight upon his knees, and folded his arms across his chest, "I ain't never goin' ter interfere with yer again as long as I live."

"All right; I'll take you at your word. Get up now and light out for your shanty."

The villain did not need to be told a second time.

He was upon his feet in a jiffy, and then he started on a run from the spot, the laughs and jeers of the miners ringing in his ears and no doubt sounding anything but pleasant to him.

"I reckon that will be about all," said Wild, nodding to the spectators. "Now then, boys, we will go and get our breakfast, so we will make an early start for Lively Rick's Ranch."

As the young deadshot and his partners turned to walk toward the inn, Barrymore proposed three cheers for the young deadshot again.

But the three never turned their heads as the miners responded and awoke the echoes with their yells.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE RANCH.

Wild and his partners found the girls on the porch as they walked up to the Hexter Inn.

They had risen but a few minutes before, and hearing the shots they hastened to get outside and see what the trouble was.

The grilling Wild had given Red Randy had taken place in front of the saloon, which was on the opposite side of the street, and not more than a couple of hundred feet from the place where our friends were stopping.

"What did you do, Wild?" Arietta asked, looking at the boy and smiling.

"Well, I put the big bluffer through a course of sprouts. Et," was the reply. "After I got done with him he got on his knees and promised not to interfere with me again. But I didn't expect him to keep his word, for he is not that sort of a man. I suppose he will follow us out to Rick's ranch. If he does, you can bet he will be sorry for it."

He then related all that had happened, and the girls could not help laughing at the cowardice the bad man had showed.

While they were talking it over the breakfast bell rang, so they all went inside and were not long in disposing of the meal.

Then before the miners of the camp had started for their work they were ready to leave, and as they mounted

their horses in front of the inn they were given a rousing send-off.

But Red Randy was not there.

Probably he knew better than to show up, since he could tell by this time that his star was no longer in the ascendancy.

What Barrymore had said should have been enough to convince him that he was no longer to be a terror in the camp.

The party started off now, and just as they were rounding a turn that would shut it from the view of the miners another cheer went up.

They waved their hats, and then the trip to Lively Rick's had fairly begun.

It was about forty miles that they had to go, as they were all glad to get such an early start.

However, forty miles was nothing to Young Wild West and his friends, since they were in the habit of usually covering fifty or sixty miles in a day.

The ranch Lively Rick had come in possession of a few months before was watered by a sluggish stream that was fed from the brooks that ran down the mountainside.

The grass that grew upon the feeding grounds of the cattle was not much, but the abundant growth of mesquite along the banks of the stream afforded excellent fodder for them, and they actually thrived upon it.

Cattle raising in Arizona at the time of which we write was not nearly as extensive as it is now; still, money was made from the business.

It happened that Rick had struck the right spot, and he was in a fair way to make considerable money.

Our friends were quite glad to tell him this, for he had been in hard luck almost ever since they knew him until he became established on the ranch.

But the fact that a relative had died in Carson City, and he was to go with his wife to get quite a large sum of money, made him appear all the more lucky.

When the party had covered about ten miles they came to the creek, which ran directly through the center of the range, and quite close to the ranch house and other buildings.

"If it wasn't for this here stream, I reckon there wouldn't be much use of thinkin' about raisin' cattle here," Rick explained, as he pointed to the creek with a certain degree of pride. "There ain't no doubt but what things would grow here right smart if there was only water enough ter feed ther ruts. It don't rain very much in these parts, yer know."

"Well, no doubt the time will come when the water that comes down from the mountains will be turned over to what is now nothing but desert land, and almost everything will be growing," said Wild. "There certainly is no finer place in the country than Arizona."

"Parts of it, yer mean, Wild," spoke up the scout, shaking his head. "I think there's places in this here territory that would be about ther last ones a feller would like ter stop at."

"Oh, yes, Charlie, but you must remember that the desert does not take up the whole of Arizona. Some of the land is as fertile as any in the whole United States. You know that pretty well, I reckon."

"Yes, I'll admit to that," and the scout nodded approvingly.

Then as they rode on a little further, he said to the ranchman:

"Have you got a putty good lot of men workin' for yer, Rick?"

"Some is all right," was the reply. "But it jest happened that last month five of ther best ones I had workin' for me got struck with ther gold fever an' quit. I hired five others in ther place of 'em, an' though they seem ter be doin' all right, I can't say I like 'em very much. That's one reason why I was anxious ter git somebody ter look after ther ranch while me an' Kate went ter Carson City."

"What makes you think they are not exactly the right kind of men, Rick?" Wild asked, showing no little interest.

"Well," and Lively Rick shrugged his shoulders, "they seem ter be ther sort what likes ter drink an' gamble a whole lot. But they've been doin' ther work putty well, though they don't never want me ter find fault with 'em."

"Oh, I see. They are the kind of cowboys who don't take a great deal of stock in the boss."

"I reckon that's about the size of it, Wild. But what was I goin' ter do? I couldn't git no others. But I reckon you won't have no trouble with 'em. They'll soon find out that you're ther boss, an' then they'll do putty well as they're told, most likely."

"Well, before I undertake to run the ranch for you, you had better tell me whether or not I am to use my own judgment in all things."

"Sartin, I want you to use your own judgment, Wild. You oughter know that. Don't I always put faith in everything you say or do?"

"Yes, I know that. But I don't want to discharge any of your men while you are gone without I know it would be sanctioned by you."

"I don't care what you do. I know for sartin that I'll find things right when I come back. If I left anyone besides you folks on ther ranch, I wouldn't feel that way. But I know what you are."

"I suppose your cowboys are in the habit of riding over to Hexter every pay-day, are they not?"

"Oh, yes, an' sometimes afore then. Ther five new ones has been over there three times already, an' they ain't been workin' for me more than three weeks."

"I see. Well, I can't say as I would like to have such a gang working for me as that. But never mind. Maybe they are all right, after all."

Though it was a very warm day, our friends kept on at a pretty fast gait.

The pack-horses made them go a little slower than they could have otherwise done, but the ground was rapidly covered, and a little after twelve o'clock they came in sight of the ranch, which lay nestled in a little valley about two miles distant.

"There she is!" exclaimed Lively Rick, showing no little pride as he pointed out the house and other buildings. "I'm sartinly a happy man when I think that I own this place. Me an' Kate is gittin' along fine here, an' with ther money we expect ter git from Carson City, I reckon we'll soon feel as though we're fixed all right for life."

Keeping along close to the bank of the creek they soon reached the house.

Before they were within a mile of it the ranchman's wife and children were seen on the porch waiting for them.

Though they had seen some cattle and three or four of the cowboys off to the left, they had not crossed the creek to join them, so Young Wild West and his partners were yet to meet the men they were to have charge of during the absence of the ranchman and his wife.

As they rode up to the house and came to a halt, Nevada Kate ran to the girls, laughing and crying by turns.

She was an old friend, and not until she had given them all half a dozen hugs and as many kisses apiece, could she say a word of welcome.

"I knowed who it was ther minute I seen yer comin' over ther slope," she declared, as she held Arietta's hand tightly and fairly danced with joy. "I know what you have come here for, too. You're goin' ter stay here while me an' Rick goes away for two weeks. Ain't that right?" and she looked at Wild and ceased smiling, as though she felt that she might be wrong, after all.

"That's right, Kate," the boy answered. "I reckon we struck Hexter in just about the right time."

"I'm so glad. But come on inside. I've got my woman on ther hustle ter git a chicken dinner ready for yer. I know yer all like fried chicken."

"Um!" exclaimed the scout, smacking his lips. "You kin bet your life I do, even if ther rest don't."

"Well, you know very well that we all do, Charlie," his wife spoke up, laughingly.

Then she hastened inside the house, declaring that she wanted to help along with the dinner.

Half an hour later things were running along very smoothly.

The chicken was being fried and the muffins were already baked, while the potatoes were being taken from the pot, steaming and hot.

It certainly was a genuine old-fashioned chicken dinner that our friends sat down to that day, and to say they enjoyed it would not be quite expressing it.

The life they led in the open air, and the exercise they took was bound to sharpen their appetites, and anything that was a little extra tasted very good to them.

They lingered a little longer than usual at the table, for there was much to talk about.

But finally Rick declared that it would be a good time to go and introduce Wild and his partners to the men who worked on the ranch.

"I know just where to find 'em all," he declared, "so it won't take more than a couple of hours ter do it."

It was about the middle of the afternoon when they mounted their horses and rode out upon the range.

They headed for a herd of about two hundred cattle that was grazing along the bank of the creek, and as they neared the spot they came in sight of some men sitting in the shade of a group of trees playing cards.

Wild saw that there were five of them, and he guessed right away that they were the new hands Lively Rick had engaged the first of the month.

He was right in this, for the ranchman was not long in telling him so.

"There's one man among 'em," he continued, "what's

got ther name of Husker. He seems ter be ther leader of ther gang, as what he says they always agree ter. That's him there—ther one with ther dark skin—what's lookin' at us so sharp like."

The man in question was puffing away at a cigar and holding cards in his hands.

While the other four were looking at them, this man seemed to be more interested than they were.

"Hello, boys!" called out Riek, as he rode up and brought his horse to a halt. "How is things goin'?"

"All right, I reckon," retorted the man called Husker, in a rather surly tone of voice. "There wasn't nothin' much ter do, so we thought we would pass ther time away in a game of poker."

"Well, I reckon that's a good enough way ter pass ther time. But see here, Husker! This is Young Wild West an' his pards, Cheyenne Charlie an' Jim Dart. Young Wild West is goin' ter run ther ranch for me while I'm away."

"Oh, is that so?" and the dark-skinned cowboy cast a searching glance at our hero. "It seems ter me," he added, "that yer oughter git a man ter be ther boss. What's a boy know about ranchin'?"

"I thought you had heard me speak enough about Young Wild West ter know that he kin run a ranch as good as any man as ever lived," said Riek, a little testily.

"Well, I don't believe everything I hear said, even if it comes from my boss."

Wild and his partners saw right away that the man was just in the humor to have a row.

But they were not disposed to pay much attention to him, though Charlie evidently would have been pleased to get into an altercation just then, for he was built that way, so to speak.

Riek now introduced them all, calling them by their names.

All but Husker were civil enough, but he seemed to look rather contemptuously upon Wild and Jim.

"Boss," said he, after they had talked for a while, "I reckon I could have run things all right for yer while you was away. But since you wanted ter git someone else, I should think you would have took that man, instead of pickin' out Young Wild West."

He nodded to Cheyenne Charlie as he said this.

"Maybe you think that way," the scout retorted, quickly, "but I want yer to understand that Young Wild West is my leader. I'm about ten years older than him, I know, but that don't say that I know as much about things as he does. What Young Wild West don't know about runnin' a ranch, or runnin' anything else, in my mind, ain't worth knowin'. Maybe you'll find that out afore long."

"Maybe I will, an' maybe I won't," was the reply.

"See here, Husker," spoke up Lively Riek, sharply, "I hired you for a month, ther same as I did ther rest of yer. Now if I thought there was goin' ter be any trouble while I was away, I'd pay yer off an' let yer go right now."

"Oh, I reckon there ain't goin' ter be no trouble," and the man's tone of voice softened instantly. "I'm one of ther kind of galoots what always likes ter say what I feel, an' that's why I've talked this way. I don't know Young Wild West, an' jest 'cause he's a boy made me think that he wasn't ther right sort of a person to be boss over us."

"Well, jest git that notion out of your mind. You'll

find that Young Wild West is as white as they make 'em. He's all wool an' a yard wide."

Husker now stepped up and put out his hand to our hero.

"Young Wild West," said he, bowing, "I want yer to excuse me for sayin' what I did. As I jest told ther boss, I always speak ther way I feel, an' I thought right away that it wasn't no boy's place ter be boss over a gang of cowboys."

"Well, that's all right," Wild answered, bound to give the fellow a chance. "I reckon you will find me a good enough boss. You know what your work is, and if you do it in the right way you will never hear a word of complaint from me. I have agreed to run the ranch for Lively Riek while he is away, and you can bet I am going to do it—and do it in the right way, too."

"Good!" and then taking off his hat, Husker proposed three cheers for the new boss of the ranch.

A few minutes later our friends mounted their horses and rode on to find the rest of the cowboys, who were old hands.

"That fellow talked as though he is your foreman, Riek," said Wild, as they got out of hearing of the five.

"He always does, but he ain't," was the reply. "My foreman is Dock Jay. He don't git along very well with Husker, though there ain't never been much trouble as yet, as far as I know. But Husker generally does what he's told, after they have a little argument."

"Well, I'll tell you plainly that I consider Husker to be no good. You needn't be surprised if you don't find him here when you get back from Carson City."

"All right, Wild. I knowed putty well that it wouldn't take you long ter size him up for what he was."

"I'm sartin he won't be here when you git baek. Riek," declared Cheyenne Charlie. "He's what I call a sneakin' coyote. I wonder where them fellers gits so much money ter play poker with. I'll bet they had as much as a hundred dollars layin' on that rock when we come up. Yer ain't paid 'em anything yet, have yer?"

"They've each had ten dollars apiece in advance," the ranchman answered.

"Well, that makes it look all ther more strange. Where do yer s'pose they got all that money from they was playin' eards with?"

"That's something we'll have to find out, Charlie," said Wild, quietly.

They rode on for a few miles and found a couple of the regular cowboys who had been there when Young Wild West and his friends visited the ranch once before.

They gave our hero and his partners a warm reception, which told how well they liked him.

It was the same when they found the rest of the men later on, and when it had been explained to them that Wild was to run the ranch, and all showed how well satisfied they were, our hero felt that if there was any trouble it would surely come from Husker and his four companions.

CHAPTER VI.

RED RANDY FINDS ALLIES.

It was evident that Red Randy was watching Young Wild West and his friends when they left the mining

camp, for about ten minutes after they disappeared he appeared on the street and walked with a swaggering air over to the saloon.

Some of the miners were already leaving to go to their daily toil, but it happened that several of them yet remained talking about Young Wild West and what had happened to the bad man.

One of these happened to be Barrymore, and just as he started to leave the saloon he came face to face with Red Randy.

Though hardly expecting to see him just then, Barrymore got ready for trouble in a hurry.

His hand slid to the butt of a revolver in a twinkling, and noticing the action, Red Randy called out:

"I see you're ready for me, eh?"

"Yes, that's what's ther matter," was the reply. "I've been thinkin' ther matter over, an' I've sorter decided that you ain't goin' ter have things around here your own way any more. Ter show you that I mean business, I'll jest go out in ther middle of ther road an' shoot it out with you."

"No, yer won't," was the quick reply. "I reckon I've done all ther shootin' I'll ever do in this here camp. I ain't no fool, an' I know putty well that there ain't none of yer as has got any particular use for me. I'm goin' ter quit ther diggin's, that's what I am."

This remark surprised his hearers not a little.

"Well," said Barrymore, quickly, "I reckon there ain't nobody as is goin' ter ask yer ter stay here, Randy. I might as well tell yer that I think your room is better than your company."

"Now don't go to pilin' it on. I've had enough as it is. But say!" and Red Randy turned and looked at the honest miner. "What will yer give me for my claim?"

"I don't know as I want it, but if I did I wouldn't put a price on it. What do yer want for it?"

"Well, I s'pose yer know that it ain't worth an awful lot. But if you'll give me a thousand dollars you kin have it."

"Do yer mean that, Randy?"

"I sartinly do."

"All right; come over to ther store right away. I reckon I've got a thousand dollars that ain't in use."

Nearly everyone there knew that the claim was cheap at that price, and they were surprised to think that Red Randy would sell out for that amount.

But he was very much in earnest, and as soon as the storekeeper could be found the papers were signed and the money was paid.

"That settles it with me, as far as Hexter is concerned," declared the ruffian, as he pocketed the money. "I won't say I'll never come back here, but if I do come it will jest be as a visitor. Now then, I want ter buy a horse."

It happened that there were several for sale in the camp, so in less than half an hour he had purchased a steed with the necessary equipments.

This done, he bought a gallon of whisky, which was supplied to him in a demijohn, and then purchasing a few things in the way of supplies at the store, he mounted and rode off without even bidding anyone good-by.

Those who watched him as he disappeared saw him take the trail that Young Wild West had followed less than an hour before, and it was easy for them to guess that he was still bent on being revenged upon the young deadshot.

This was certainly the case, for Red Randy had sacrificed all that belonged to him for that very purpose.

He had learned that Young Wild West was going to take charge of the ranch while Lively Rick and his wife went to Carson City after a legacy, and he figured that he would surely find a way to get a sly shot at the boy he hated so much.

In spite of the lead they had on him, it would have been comparatively easy for the villainous miner to have overtaken our friend before they reached the ranch.

But this was not his intention, for he knew very well that if he happened to fire a shot and make a miss of it, it would be all up with him.

What he wanted to do was to catch the young deadshot some time alone when he was not thinking of such a thing as being shot at from ambush.

Then he would soon settle him.

Red Randy halted at noon by the side of the little stream that ran through the center of the cattle range.

He ate some of the food he had brought along, drank some whisky and water, and then lighted his pipe and sat down under a tree to take a rest, while his horse nibbled at the mesquite that grew along the bank of the creek.

He had not slept very well the night before, and the pipe being rather soothing to him, he dropped off into a doze, which soon turned into a deep sleep.

When he awoke he looked at the sun and found that it was past the middle of the afternoon.

"I reckon I had a putty good nap," he muttered, as he stretched himself and looked around for his horse.

The animal was not far distant, and appeared to be perfectly contented.

The bad man was not long in catching the steed and saddling him.

Then he mounted him, and after looking over the scene, he decided to cross the creek and keep along with it until he sighted the ranch.

He had not covered more than half a mile when as he rode over the top of a ridge he came in sight of a small herd of cattle and some cowboys.

He was so close to them that he feared to turn back lest they might suspect him as being a bad character.

"I'll ride over an' have a talk with 'em," he thought. "It might be that I know some of 'em. If ther galoot they call Husker is one of 'em, I'll find a friend. That feller is all right, 'cause I happen ter know that he's about ther same sort of a man as I am."

As he neared the cowboys, who were dismounted and sitting and standing about the trunk of a big tree, he gave a nod of satisfaction, for they were the very ones he was most desirous of meeting just then.

They were the five cowboys Lively Rick had hired at the first of the month, and as Husker saw the bad man of Hexter approaching, he took off his hat and waved him a welcome, for he readily recognized him as one he had met and associated with during his trips to the mining camp.

"Hello, pard," he called out. "What brings you out here?"

"Well, I've quit ther gold diggins for a while, Husker," was the reply. "I'm mighty glad ter meet yer, too. I feel ther need of a friend jest now. It happens that I ain't got one left in Hexter."

"Why, how is that?" and the rascally cowboy rushed forward and shook hands with him.

"Did yer ever hear of a boy by ther name of Young Wild West?" the miner asked, as he slipped from the back of his horse.

"I reckon I did. Why, what makes yer ask that?"

"Well, he's been ther means of makin' me lose all ther friends I had in ther minin' camp."

"Is that so?" and Husker glanced at his companions in a peculiar sort of way, which the bad man did not fail to take notice of.

"Yes, that's so. I hear that he's goin' ter be your boss for two or three weeks."

"Yes, that's right. We've seen him, ain't we, boys?" and Husker nodded to his companions.

"Oh, yes," came the reply. "We've seen him all right."

"I s'pose yer all like him first rate?" queried Red Randy, eyeing them sharply.

There was a short silence, and then Husker retorted:

"Since I know you putty well, Red, I'll tell yer that we don't. If it wasn't that we had a putty good thing of it here, we'd quit ther blamed old ranch right away. But there's money in this here job we've got, ain't there, boys?"

An affirmative nod came from the four, though they appeared to be somewhat uneasy.

"Makin' a little more than your wages, I s'pose?" ventured Red Randy, grinning at them.

"Oh, yes," declared Husker, and again his companions showed signs of uneasiness.

"Sell a few cattle now and then, I s'pose?"

Husker smiled but said nothing to this.

"But you'd better look out," the bad man went on, shaking his head and looking rather solemn. "If you try that game while Young Wild West is bossin' yer, yer might be sorry. They say he's ther sharpest young galoot in ther whole West."

"Well, I reckon we'll take our chances with him," Husker said, in a rather low tone of voice. "If he should happen ter press us too hard he'll git somethin' that he ain't lookin' for."

The ice was broken now, so slapping the cowboy on the shoulder, Red Randy said, in a whisper:

"Jest walk along with me a little ways. I want ter talk to yer in private."

Husker seemed ready to do this, and bidding his companions to wait where they were, he followed the villainous miner to a clump of bushes something like a hundred yards distant.

"Now then," said Red Randy, looking around to make sure there was nobody near enough to hear what he said, "I'll tell yer jest why I quit Hexter. I sold out my claim an' bought this here horse to come out to this ranch, an' for ther sole purpose of killin' Young Wild West. Do yer hear what I say, pard?"

"I hear yer," answered Husker, not showing much surprise.

"Well, now, listen, and' I'll tell yer jest why I hate ther boy so."

Then he related all that had happened at the mining camp, taking care to lay the entire blame of the starting of the trouble to our hero.

"It don't seem strange that I should want ter git revenge, does it, Husker?" he asked, when he had concluded.

"I should say not, Red. Go ahead. You kin count on me an' them four men over there ter help yer out in this. Of course we might want yer to help us out in gittin' away with some of ther cattle. But I advise yer if yer go to droppin' ther boy to do it so that there won't be no one ter blame for it. Maybe yer could make it appear like an accident."

"I'll think it over an' find a way, you kin bet."

They talked about ten minutes, and Young Wild West was the sole topic of conversation.

Then Husker led the way back to his waiting companions, and looking at them sharply, he said:

"Boys, we've got a silent partner in our cattle stealin' game. Red Randy is all right, an' I happen ter know it. He's come out here for ther purpose of cleanin' out Young Wild West, an' he wants ter do it so it will appear like an accident."

The four cowboys appeared to be a little bit dubious about it, but when their leader and the bad man had talked a while with them they readily fell in with the scheme.

"Where is the rest of the cowboys workin' on this here ranch?" Red Randy asked, after a pause, as he looked over the ranch.

"Oh, they're around somewhere," Husker answered. "We don't stay with 'em much. They ain't our sort, yer know."

"I see. Maybe they don't like yer very much."

"Well, we don't care if they don't. It happens that there ain't no other hands ter be got, so I reckon we're good ter hold ther job a while. It ain't likely that Young Wild West is goin' ter discharge us, though from what ther boss said, he'll have ther power ter do jest as he likes about sich things."

"Well, where kin I meet you fellers to-night? Ain't there some place around close by ther ranch that I could make a sort of headquarters of?"

"You bet there is. We've got a headquarters of our own. We've got to have that, you know, in our line."

"I see. I wonder if I kin git ter it without bein' seen by any of ther rest of ther cowboys?"

"Well, I don't know about that, 'cause ther place ain't easy to find, though it ain't more than a mile from ther corral. I'll tell yer what you had better do, Red."

"Tell me, an' I'll do it."

"You ride over to that high ridge, which is about five miles away, an' if yer keep on along with it for about another mile you'll find a big tree that's fell down across a dry water-course. You wait there till after it gits dark, an' I'll come an' find yer. Then I'll pilot yer to our secret hang-out."

"All right, put your hand there!" exclaimed the villainous miner.

The two shook hands in hearty fashion, and then after he had done the same with the other four rascals, Red Randy mounted his horse and started away for the ridge.

In due time he found the dead tree, and then he dismounted and sat down to wait the coming of darkness.

He made something like a meal of what he had brought with him in the eatable line from Hexter, and then he brought his pipe and tobacco into service.

After a rather tedious wait, darkness arrived, and soon after that he heard the unmistakable sounds of approaching horses.

Presently the five villainous cowboys appeared before him, and Red Randy greeted them warmly.

CHAPTER VII.

WILD'S SUSPICIONS ARE CONFIRMED.

When Young Wild West and his friends got back to the house they were met by Nevada Kate, Lively Rick's wife.

"Well, did yer have a look at all ther men, Wild?" she asked.

"Yes, we saw all of them, I believe," was the reply.

"Well, what do yer think of them five new ones?"

"Not a great deal, Kate," and the boy shook his head, for he knew by the way she acted that she did not think much of them, either.

"I knowed yer wouldn't. I'll jest tell yer what I think about 'em. They're no good. That feller they call Husker is a bad egg, an' I'm sure of it. I think he's a cattle thief."

"Ah!" and our hero at once turned to Lively Rick. "Have you lost any cattle lately, Rick?"

"I sorter think I have, but yer see I never had 'em counted jest right, an' I can't tell exactly," was the reply.

"Well, there's one thing certain," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, "them galoots has got altogether too much money for cowboys who works for sixty dollars a month. Since they ain't had but ten dollars apiece in three weeks, I don't see how they could have so much money without there's somethin' crooked goin' on. If you've lost any cattle, Rick, you kin bet your life that they've stolen 'em, an' got rid of 'em somewhere."

"It might be," admitted the ranchman, shaking his head. "I'll jest question ther other boys about 'em a little ther first time I git a chance. Maybe they know somethin' that they ain't had a mind ter tell me yet."

"Well, Rick," said Wild, in his cool and easy way, "don't you go to worrying about anything that has happened or what may happen. You just light out for Carson City as soon as you can get ready. I will guarantee you that we will take care of the ranch."

"I know yer will, Wild. Then I s'pose I'd better leave ther whole thing ter you."

"Yes, that's right. You go ahead and pack up what you are going to take with you and strike out in the morning, so you can get to the railroad station by the next day noon. You will have to stop at Hexter, I suppose, over night."

"Yes, that's what we figured on doin'."

"Well, it won't take you very long to get ready, will it?"

"I reckon not. Kate's got her dress all ready what she's goin' ter wear, an' I reckon my clothes is all rigged up. We're goin' ter take ther two youngest kids with us, yer know, so ther gals won't be bothered with 'em."

"Well, I don't know as they would mind the bother of them, but I suppose it will be a good idea to take them with you. The others are quite big enough to be left here, I reckon."

At the supper table the matter was talked over, and it was decided that the ranchman should start in the forenoon of the following day.

One of the cowboys was to accompany them and fetch back the team and buckboard they would ride over in.

There was not a great deal to do on the ranch just then, though it was necessary for Rick to have his full supply of men, since he expected a little later on to gather in what cattle he wanted to sell and drive them over to the nearest railroad station.

Wild knew that the most of them would be in shortly after dark, so after enjoying the company of his own party and the host and hostess for a while, he arose from his seat on the porch and started for the long, low building that was used by the cowboys as a sleeping quarters when they were not out on the range.

A bright light was shining from the window, so he knew that there was somebody there.

He walked around to the door, and, finding it open, promptly entered.

The boy was not surprised when he saw that Hop was there.

There were four cowboys, too, and a game of cards was just being started.

"Boys," said the young deadshot, rather sharply, "I reckon you know what kind of a poker player Hop is. Take my advice and be very careful."

"We know, Wild," one of the men answered, smilingly. "But we ain't goin' ter play for anything very high. We know Hop kin beat us out of our eyes, but we jest can't keep from playin' with him. We've decided to make it a quarter ante an' limit ther game to a dollar a bet."

"Well, even at that rate, if you keep at it long enough, you will lose all the money you have."

"Well, that wouldn't be very much," and the cowboys laughed at what he thought was quite a joke, no doubt.

"So you are pretty near broke, then?" queried our hero.

"Yes; I'll bet there ain't more than twenty dollars ter all of us. It's quite a while since pay-day, yer know."

"Yes, about three weeks, I reckon. But say! we saw the five new hands playing a game of draw this afternoon, and they seemed to have a lot of money. How is it that they can save their wages better than you can?"

"Well, they must have had quite a little pile when they struck ther job," one of the cowboys ventured.

"I don't know about that, Bill," another spoke up. "When they first came here I lent one of 'em two dollars. He paid me back in less than a week, too, an' he seemed to have plenty of money after that."

"See here, Bill," and Wild looked sharply at the man who bore that name. "Have you missed any cattle lately?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Have you got any idea where they went?"

"Well, not exactly," and the man appeared to be rather uneasy and looked at his companions in a peculiar sort of way.

Wild now sat down, for he knew that the cowboys had their suspicions about the missing cattle.

"See here," he said. "I want you fellows to tell me just what you think about this affair. In the first place, you will admit that some cattle are missing?"

"That's right, Wild," and the cowboy who had spoken first gave a nod of his head.

"Well, in the second place, the five new hands seem to have plenty of money?"

"Yes, that's right, I reckon."

"Well, since I am satisfied that they are no good, it seems to me that maybe they have stolen the cattle and hid them somewhere."

"That's what I've been thinkin'," one of them spoke up promptly.

"We've all thought that way," the man called Bill declared, "though we ain't never seen anything as would give any proof of it."

"Well, you can bet I'll find out something about it, and before very many days have elapsed, too," said our hero. "In the meantime, I want you fellows to keep a watch on the five new hands, and anything you see them do that they should not do, I want you to report to me. You needn't consider yourselves as spies, or that you're doing anything mean. I am well satisfied that Husker as a bad man, and that he would stoop at anything to gain his own ends. The four with him are all about the same stamp, I think, so that means that they need watching. If they are cattle thieves, the quicker we find out the better it will be. Lively Rick can't afford to lose his cattle in that way, you know."

"Sartin he can't," declared Bill, shaking his head. "You kin bet we'll do as you want us ter, Young Wild West. Ther boss is a very fine man ter work for, an' we want ter do ther right thing by him. But I will say that we ain't never seen anything very wrong out of ther new hands. Of course, they won't have much ter do with us, an' they won't pay much attention to what ther foreman says."

While the man was speaking, another cowboy came into the shack.

It was Dick Jay, the foreman.

"Hello, Dick," said Wild, nodding to him. "You're just the man I want to see."

"All right, Wild," was the reply. "I'm at your service. Just tell me what yer want, an' you kin bet your life I'll do it."

"Well, I was just talking with the men here about the five new hands and the cattle you have missed lately."

"I see," and the foreman gave a nod and looked rather grave.

"It is my opinion, Dick, that the five new hands have been stealing the cattle. I may as well tell you that without beating around the bush."

"Well, I've sorter thought that way myself, though I ain't never been able ter find proof of it," admitted Jay, shaking his head and looking puzzled.

Wild then had quite a long talk with him, and the result was that he picked up enough from what the cowboys had seen and heard to almost convince him that Husker and his companions were very bad characters.

"Now then," said he, as he started to leave the shack. "I want you all to keep a sharp watch on the new hands, though you needn't let them know that you are doing it. Anything you see or hear that is worth while you can tell me as soon as possible. Before I go I want to warn you again not to play draw poker with Hop."

"Allee light, Mislér Wild," the clever Chinee spoke up,

with a bland smile. "Me allee samee play some other gamee, len."

"Well, if you win any money from these fellows I will certainly make you give it back to them, so you can make up your mind to that, Hop."

"Allee light, Mislér Wild; me no wantee winee money ffrom Melican mans. Me gottee plenty money, so be."

Wild went on out, and when his footsteps died away, Hop nodded to the cowboys, and observed:

"Now len, if you no wantee play dlaw poken we play um gamee ley callee ukee."

"Euchre, yer mean," spoke up the foreman, who, like the rest, was very fond of cards.

"Lat light. Ukee. Lat velly goodee gamee."

"I never knowed yer could play euchre," said one of the others, as Hop began sorting over the pack of cards to get the euchre deck from it.

"Me no know how play velly muchee, but me no care for lat. Me no wantee win money; me wantee pass um timee away."

It happened that only three of the cowboys cared to play, and one of them was the foreman himself.

"Shall we play partners, Hop?" Dick Jay asked, as he took a seat opposite the Chinaman.

"No," and Hop shook his head. "Evellybody for himself, so be. Lat makee velly muchee better gamee."

"It makes a blamed sight harder game ter play," observed Bill, who sat on Hop's left. "But it's as hard for one as another, I s'pose, so let her go. We'll play for a dollar a game, jest to make it interestin'."

"Allee light," and Hop nodded, showing that he was pleased to let it go that way.

The fact was that Dick Jay was a very clever card player, and as the game of euchre was his favorite one, he actually felt himself equal to the Chinaman, even if he knew him to be a professional card sharp.

The other two cowboys took seats near by so they could watch the game, and puffed away at their cigarettes.

The cut for deal was made, and the foreman won.

Knowing that he had a very clever cheat to deal with, he decided to do something in that line himself.

Ignoring the other two players, as far as giving them any particular cards went, he dealt Hop the right, left and nine of spades.

Then he managed to give himself the king, queen and ten, while he turned up the ace as the trump.

The man on his left, of course, passed.

Hop looked his hand over and promptly ordered it up, since he possessed an ace for a side card.

Whether he had an idea that the foreman was cheating or not could not be told, but the chances are that almost anyone would have done as he did.

With the two bowers and nine, and an ace for a side card, he certainly held a pretty good hand.

The man on the left of the dealer laid the ace of hearts.

Hop happened to have one, so he threw it up.

The next player was able to follow suit, too, but it happened that Dick Jay had not, so he put on his ten of trumps and took in the trick.

"Lat pletty goodee, so be," and the Chinaman smiled and nodded his head.

"Yes, I reckon you're great, Hop," was the reply.

"Allee light, me gottee pletty goodee hand, so be."

The foreman now led his ace of trumps.

Hop took it with his left bower, of course, and then he led off the right.

Jay laughed as he threw on his queen of trumps, for as he held the ace of clubs he thought it was impossible for Hop to gain the three tricks.

Hop played the ace of diamonds next, and when it came Dick's turn, he trumped it with his king, making two tricks for him, while the Chinaman had the same.

Then for the first time he realized that the Chinaman held the remaining trump.

He threw down his ace, and when Hop took it with the ten spot he did not feel quite as clever as he had when he dealt the cards for the purpose of euchring Hop.

"Lat velly goodee, so be," declared the Celestial, grinning at him across the table. "You velly smartee ukee player, Misler Dick."

"That's all right," was the reply. "I certainly thought I had yer. I had four trumps, an' you had three, but blamed if you didn't git your point, after all."

"Lat allee light, me givee you um samee kind me havee last timee when me deal. You waitee."

The next man dealt and succeeded in making a point, and then it came Hop's turn.

The clever Chinese shuffled the cards briskly, and though the cowboys watched him intently, they could not see that he was doing anything wrong with them.

When the foreman picked up his hand he found that he possessed the right, queen and ten of spades, with the ace of clubs and the ace of diamonds.

This was a pretty good euchre hand, so he thought, but as he knew pretty well that the Chinaman knew exactly what he was doing, he simply watched and waited.

It was the ace of spades that Hop turned up for the trump.

"I s'pose yer want me ter order yer up, Hop," said Dick, laughingly, "but I ain't goin' ter do it."

"Allee light," was the reply, and as the others had passed, he picked up the trump.

"Now then, this is where I'm goin' ter euchre you," the foreman declared.

The man on Hop's left led a small diamond, and Jay promptly put his ace upon it.

The other man happened to have a diamond, too, but Hop did not.

He put the nine of spades on it and took the trick.

Then he led the left bower, which Dick took with his right bower.

"That's one trick for us, anyhow, Hop," the foreman declared with a grin.

"Lat allee light; me gottee one tlick, too, so be."

Jay now led the ace of clubs, but when he saw Hop trump it with his king he felt that there was no chance of euchring him, and there was not, either, for the Chinaman led off his ace and thus gained his point.

The game continued, and the result was that Hop won easily.

Three or four more games were played, and as he won them all, the cowboys wearied of that sort of amusement.

But Jay still was of the opinion that he could beat the

clever Chinese at his own game, so he offered to play him single handed.

"We'll make it for five dollars, Hop," he said, "an' only play one game, too. Wild needn't know anything about it, so if you win you won't have ter give me ther money back. I don't want it back if I lose."

"Allee light," was the bland reply. "Me lettee you dealee evely timee."

"Yer will, eh?"

"Yes, lat light. You go ahead and deal, so be."

Hop had the pack of cards in his hands as he spoke, and he promptly gave them to his opponent.

Having no chance to look over the cards, the foreman was compelled to deal them out straight this time.

He turned up a diamond, and finding that he had the right bower in his hand, as well as an ace for a side card, he picked it up.

But Hop had just one card too many for him, and succeeded in euchring him.

Then before he could gather up the cards again, Hop had them in his hands.

It was easy to tell why this was done, for he certainly mixed them about somehow, so the foreman could not keep track of them.

The result was that Hop made two that time.

Jay was waiting to grab up the cards as the last one was played, but the Chinaman was altogether too quick for him, and the result was the same as before.

It went on this way until Hop scored the ten points, while his opponent only succeeded in making three.

"I reckon there ain't no way of gittin' ther best of you, Hop," declared Jay, shaking his head. "Here's your five dollars. You sartinly won it, fair an' square."

"Lat allee light, Misler Dick," was the reply, and then Hop arose and shook the sleeves of his coat.

Much to the surprise of the cowboys, as many as a dozen different bowers fell from his sleeves upon the table.

"Well, by thunder!" exclaimed the foreman. "That's how yer done it, eh? Well, I'll give yer my word that I never seen yer cheat a bit. How did yer do it, anyhow?"

"Me no tellee you, Misler Dick," was the reply. "If me tellee you you no know how to do it. Me velly smartee Chinese. Now len, me showee you nicee lillee tlick."

He gathered up the scattered cards, and then held the pack over his head.

But just what he meant to do the cowboys never learned, for just then a revolver cracked and the pack of cards went flying from the Chinaman's hand.

"Whoopee, whoopee! Wow, wow!" a voice exclaimed, and then in stepped Cheyenne Charlie, a broad grin on his face.

"Whattee mattee, Misler Charlie?" demanded Hop, somewhat angrily. "Whattee you shootee like lat for?"

"That's all right, you heathen galoot. I've been watchin' an' listenin' ter you for about ten minutes. Now then, I reckon you kin shell out ther money you won."

Hop made no protest, for he knew it would be useless, but the foreman declared that he would not take his money back.

But Charlie insisted, so he reluctantly gave in.

That wound up the card playing for the night, though Charlie remained quite a while and told stories to the cow-

boys and listened to those they had to tell for some little time.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARIETTA PUTS WILD ON HIS GUARD.

The next morning about nine o'clock Lively Rick and his wife and the two children who were to accompany them set out from the ranch, leaving Young Wild West in full charge.

The girls mounted their horses and rode out with them for a few miles to see them off, Wild thinking it perfectly safe for them to do so.

When they finally bade the ranchman and his wife the last good-by and turned back they were about five miles from the ranch and out upon the range near the creek.

"Now then, girls," said Arietta, turning to Anna and Eloise, "we may as well ride back a little slowly. The sun isn't as hot as usual, and the air is very clear and bracing. We have got to remain here for perhaps a month, so we may as well begin to take in our surroundings and get ourselves used to them."

"That's right, Arietta," Eloise answered. "But I know I am agoing to like this fine."

"So am I," declared Anna, her eyes sparkling with delight. "Of course I suppose there will be some trouble before Rick and Kate get back. The five new hands are going to cause it, too. I can't help thinking that way, for I have listened to what Wild has been talking about, and I have taken in everything that was said."

"Well, you need not worry about that," said Arietta, smilingly. "You just leave it to Wild. He is going to run the ranch all right, see if he don't."

The girls rode on for a short distance, and then they decided to ford the creek and ride to the house on the other side.

They had barely reached the opposite bank and were riding along close to a patch of bushes, than the sharp eyes of Arietta caught sight of a face peering at her from a small clump of trees.

It was only for an instant that she saw the face, for it was quickly drawn out of sight the moment her eyes turned that way.

But in that brief view of it she recognized it as belonging to Red Randy, the bad man of the mining camp.

"Did you see that man?" she asked, in a low tone of voice.

"What man?" asked the scout's wife, looking at her in a startled way.

"Why, I saw the face of a man peering between those two little trees over there."

"I never saw him," declared Eloise, her face turning pale. "But what makes you look so grave, Arietta?"

"Well, I'll tell you, girls," was the reply. "I happened to turn my eyes over there, and I saw the face of the man who tried to shoot Wild through the window of the hotel at Hexter."

"What!" Eloise and the scout's wife were now more surprised than ever.

"I certainly made no mistake about it," declared Arietta, shaking her golden head. "That fellow has come here for no good purpose. You know very well that he hates Wild, and it is more than likely that he has come here for the purpose of killing him. We must go and find Wild at once, so we can tell him about it."

But before proceeding on her way, the girl rode straight to the spot where she had seen the face.

She went on through the bushes, but saw no trace of the man.

However, she felt certain that he was hiding somewhere about.

But she decided not to pursue the search any further, and calling to her companions to follow her, she rode on, putting her horse at a gallop.

It took them nearly an hour to find Wild and his partners, and when they at length came upon them they were just riding up to the corral, where some stray cattle were being placed by the foreman and a couple of the cowboys.

"Come here, Wild," Arietta called out.

"Why, what's the matter, little girl?" the young dead-shot asked, noticing that she was rather pale and very earnest.

"I have something to tell you.

"Well, what is it, Et?"

"The villain called Red Randy is here on the ranch."

"What!"

The boy was certainly surprised to hear this, though as he quickly thought it over there was nothing so very strange about it, after all.

"You saw him, then, Et?" he asked.

"Yes, I caught a glimpse of his evil face, but it was only for the fraction of a second."

Then she told how just after they crossed the creek she had seen the face of the bad man looking at her from the bushes.

"And you couldn't find him, eh?" queried our hero, shaking his head.

"No, Wild. I suppose I might have if I had kept on with the search, but I thought it over quickly and decided to come and tell you about it."

"Good, little girl. I am very glad that you did so. Now I know I have to be on my guard. I shall make it my business to hunt Red Randy down as soon as possible."

The conversation had been carried on in an undertone, so no one but Anna and Eloise heard it.

Wild bade the girls ride on to the house, and then he called to Charlie and Jim, and told them what he had heard.

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, his eyes flashing. "So that galoot is here, is he? Well, I'll bet all I'm worth that he's on good terms with them new hands, then. He sartinly couldn't be hangin' around here without nobody knowin' it. I wonder where them galoots are, anyhow. Wild?"

"Well, Dick says they went out about five miles to gather in a bunch of stray cows."

"S'pose we go an' look 'em up?"

"Just what I was thinking about doing," nodded the boy. "I reckon there is nothing for us to do here just now, anyhow."

Without telling the foreman anything what had hap-

pened, our three friends rode away slowly at first, but when they were half a mile distant they put their horses to a gallop and set out in the direction the five cowboys were supposed to have gone.

It was not very long before they came to the high ridge that has already been mentioned, and then just as they were passing into a little hollow they caught sight of a horseman riding at a walk a couple of hundred yards ahead of them.

Our hero instantly called a halt, for he recognized the horseman as Red Randy.

"There he is, boys," he said, in a low tone of voice. "I reckon he has not seen us coming, either. We'll just dismount and watch him. I want to see where he goes."

The boy quickly slid from the back of his horse and then crept up the bank where the bushes were plentiful, followed by his partners.

Meanwhile Red Randy was riding slowly in the direction of the hiding place he had been taken to by the five cowboys the night before.

It was nothing more or less than a cave, that was concealed from view by a mass of overhanging vines, and since that time the bad man had been hanging about the place.

But he had ventured out after seeing the ranchman and his wife go away accompanied by the three girls.

He watched until he saw the girls start to return, and then on having a good look at them, he made his way close to the creek and dismounted.

The fact was that the villain had been greatly impressed by the beauty of Arietta, and as he was making for the hidden cave he was thinking of how he might be able to abduct her and force her to be his bride.

Little did he dream that Young Wild West and his partners were watching him at that moment.

But though they were watching every movement he made, when he suddenly rode up to the overhanging vines and pushing them aside disappeared from their view, they were at a loss to tell just how he had managed to get out of their range of vision.

But they were just about far enough away so as to be unable to see how it was done.

"Great gimlets!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "That galoot disappeared right afore our very eyes, Wild."

"That's right, Charlie," was the reply. "I reckon we must go over there and find out where he went."

"That's just the thing to do," declared Jim Dart, as he turned to go back to the hollow.

Wild and Charlie followed him, and once there they started ahead on foot, taking care to keep close to the edge of the bank, which was very steep for nearly half a mile.

Our hero had marked well the spot where the bad man had disappeared, and as he neared it, it was not difficult for him to come to the conclusion that there must be a cave somewhere there.

Many times had he come across such places, and it would be nothing strange if there should be one here.

Just as he was thinking of stealing straight to the spot where he had last seen Red Randy and making an investigation, the clatter of hoofs sounded.

"Lie low, boys," he exclaimed, under his breath. "Somebody is coming."

The next minute five horsemen appeared, riding along the foot of the ridge.

When our friends saw that they were the five new hands, they were not a bit surprised.

"I thought so," said Cheyenne Charlie, nodding his head. "That galoot is in with them cowboys, you kin bet."

Wild and Jim nodded, for they were all exactly of the same opinion.

The cowboys rode straight to the spot, and one after the other disappeared from view behind the mass of overhanging vines.

"Boys," said Wild, nodding to his partners, "I reckon something is going to happen before very long. Those villains have gone into a cave to hold a consultation. The chances are that there is a plot under way to kill me. I am going to try and hear what is said. You wait here until I come back."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIENDISH PLOT OF THE VILLAINS.

It was quite a large cave that Husker and his cronies had discovered, and they had spent quite a little of their time there since they had been employed upon Lively Rick's ranch.

It was quite true that they had stolen several cattle and disposed of them at a ranch something like fifteen miles away.

Three times they had done this, each time driving the cattle to the range just as the rascally buyer was coming to drive away a number of his own cattle.

When Red Randy had been conducted to the cave the night before, he had declared it to be a fine hiding place, indeed, which it no doubt was, and just suited to the purpose of such scoundrels.

As the bad man entered the cave while Young Wild West and his partners were watching him, he had no idea that the cowboys were coming there so soon.

Hence he was agreeably surprised when they came riding in single file into the underground place.

There was plenty of room for the horses there, and as the cowboys dismounted, Red Randy called out:

"Well, this is what I call great luck, boys. Yer couldn't have come in a better time. I've got a great idea in my head, I have."

"What is it, Red?" queried Husker, looking at him eagerly.

The only light admitted to the cave came through a round opening in the rear, where there was a slope in the earth above.

But it was ample light enough for Husker to see the face of the bad man plainly, and he judged by it, and from the tone of his voice, that there was something of great importance on hand.

"What is it, Red?" he repeated, as Randy did not make an immediate reply, but stood looking at them in something like a gleeful way.

"Well, I took a little ride out not long ago ter git a look

at them gals Young Wild West brought over ter ther ranch."

"Oh!" and Husker seemed to be rather disappointed.

"I got a good look at 'em all right," went on the bad man, "an' I don't mind tellin' yer that I've fell in love with one of 'em. She's Young Wild West's sweetheart, I reckon, 'cause I heard somewhat about her over in Hexter. I've jest made up my mind that I'm goin' ter steal that gal."

"What's ther use of stealin' only one of 'em?" Husker asked, for it seemed that he readily fell into the plan that Randy was about to propose.

"Well, I reckon we could get all of 'em."

"We could fetch 'em to this cave, an' I'll bet that no one would be able ter find 'em afore we got ready ter take 'em somewhere else," resumed Husker.

"Jest what I was thinkin'," and the bad man uttered a laugh and slapped himself approvingly upon the knee. "You fellers have promised ter help me put Young Wild West out of ther world, an' of course that means that it is most likely that his partners has got ter go along with him. When that's done with ther three gals won't have nobody ter take care of 'em. I reckon we kin take charge of 'em an' treat 'em all right, too."

Again the scoundrel uttered a laugh, which sounded harsh and discordant in the cave.

One of the cowboys glanced at the other three and shook his head, showing that he did not at all approve of the plan.

But his glance had no effect upon them whatever, for it seemed that they were more than willing to aid in anything Husker proposed.

"Well, tell us how we're goin' ter do this thing," the leader of the cowboys said, as he rolled a cigarette and took a seat upon a rock near the bad man.

"Well, my plan is jest this: we'll ride over to ther ranch right away an' git ther gals. There won't be nobody there but them two heathens, an' I reckon they won't stop us any. Young Wild West and his partners is out somewhere on ther range, an' from what I've seen of ther surroundings we oughter git on ther other side of ther creek an' ride around until we git behind ther house. Then we come up jest as we please an' give ther gals a surprise. They won't be thinkin' that anything is wrong, an' we oughter git hold of 'em mighty quick. I think it would be a good deal better time ter do it right away than ter wait until Young Wild West an' his pards git at ther house."

"It sartinly would be better," admitted Husker, thoughtfully. "But see here! if it should happen ter git found out that we done it, there would be a hot time in store for us."

"How would there?" queried Red Randy, looking at him and smiling. "Of course Young Wild West an' his pards would go ter look for ther gals as soon as they found they wasn't around ther house. But that's jest what we want 'em ter do. While they was searchin' around we could lay for 'em somewhere an' put ther finish ter 'em."

"Yes, that's so. Well, I s'pose it won't be very long that we'll be able ter stay here, if we don't do this piece of business, 'cause it's most likely that Young Wild West will find out somethin' about ther cattle what's missin'. I know very well that ther foreman knows they're gone, though I don't believe he has any idea that we took 'em.

Come ter think it over, I reckon it would be a mighty good plan ter go ahead an' git them gals in our power."

"All right, then. S'pose we strike out right away?"

"Well, I'll go out an' take a look around. Maybe I kin climb a tree somewhere an' find out where Young Wild West an' ther rest of 'em are. It's most likely ther boy an' his pard has gone out ter help Dick Jay an' ther rest ter git them stray cows together. You jest wait here a little while an' I'll go out an' find out about it."

It was much cooler inside the cave than out in the hot sun, so the cowboys soon assumed easy positions and waited for their leader to return.

Husker was not gone more than ten minutes, and when he came back his face was lighted up in a satisfied way.

"Did yer find out where they was?" Randy asked.

"Well, I could jest see ther bunch over a hill, an' I'm sartin that Young Wild West an' ther rest is all over there. I could see ther ranch house, too, an' though it's quite a distance ter look, I'm sartin I seen one or two of ther gals."

"Well, let's ride over there right away, then. It'll take us putty nigh an hour, 'cause we've got ter go in a round-about way."

The one man of the party who did not take kindly to the scheme now arose, and, looking at Husker, he said:

"Do yer know one-thing, Husker? I don't exactly like this sort of thing."

"How is that, Tom?"

"Well, I've been thinkin' that maybe things won't work jest as you have got an idea they will."

"What makes yer think that way?"

"Well, I've seen things planned out afore, an' I've seen 'em go wrong, too. S'pose Young Wild West an' his pards should come ridin' up jest about ther time we got to ther house. What then?"

"They'll git shot down so quick they won't know what hit 'em," spoke up Red Randy, rather fiercely, as he touched the butt of his revolver.

"Maybe they will," said Tom, shaking his head, "but it might be that some of us might git shot down, too. From what I've heard you say yourself, this Young Wild West is a mighty quick shot."

"Well, s'pose he is? That don't say that he's goin' ter git a shot at us afore we git a shot at him, does it?"

"Well, all right. I won't say no more. I promised Husker that I'd stick ter him through thick an' thin when I joined in ther cattle stealin' game, an' you kin bet that I'm goin' ter do it, even if I die for it."

"That's ther way ter talk, Tom," said Husker, nodding his head approvingly. "You're made out of ther right kind of stuff, an' I know it. I don't blame yer for sayin' what yer did. I know as well as you do that it might not be a very easy thing ter git hold of them gals an' clean out Young Wild West an' his pards. But I think it's worth tryin', 'cause it sorter strikes me that we're goin' ter be found out by that boy, an' then we would be fit subjects for a hangin'. You all know that as well as I do. A cattle thief don't stand much show in this part of ther country. It's too far ter take him ter a town an' turn him over ter a sheriff, an' them as ketches 'em generally makes short work of 'em."

It was evident that they all knew this quite well, for

they all shrugged their shoulders and looked at each other in anything but a pleasant way.

"Well, what's ther use of talkin' over it?" said Randy. "We've made up our minds what we're goin' ter do, so we'll go ahead an' do it. Lead your horses out, boys."

The villain stepped over to his own steed, and, taking it by the bridle, went on out, pushing the trailing vines aside to permit him to do so.

It never once occurred to him to look behind any of the rocky formations he passed before leaving the cave, where it was as dark as a pocket.

If he had done so it might have been the last thing he did on earth, for at that very moment Young Wild West was hiding there.

But the villains all passed out, unconscious of this fact.

Once outside, they mounted their horses, and then Husker took the lead and rode around so they would not be likely to be seen by any of the cowboys or others who might be out on the range.

In this way they soon reached the creek, and, fording it, they headed for a sparse growth of woods that lay near by.

Riding through this, they swung around and headed for a point that was probably a couple of miles southwest of the ranch house and other buildings.

The scoundrels kept turning in their saddles every now and then to see if there were any of the cowboys in sight.

But though they caught sight of a small bunch of cattle two miles to the left, they saw nothing that looked like a man or boy.

"I reckon this thing is goin' ter turn out all right, boys," Husker declared. "If Young Wild West an' his pards is out there with Dick Jay an' ther rest, they won't know a thing about this. While we're gittin' ther gals we may as well make a raid on ther house an' git a supply of grub. There might be somethin' of money an' valuables there, too, which will come in mighty handy later on."

"Of course," nodded Red Randy. "There ain't no use leavin' anything that's worth while. We're in this game now, an' we may as well git all that kin be got."

Talking in this strain the six villains rode on, and after a while they found themselves around to the rear of the ranch house.

"Now then," said Husker, giving a nod of satisfaction, "I reckon we kin ride on up ter ther house without bein' seen by any one ther other side of it. Come on, boys. We'll be mighty pleasant ter them gals when we git there, an' I'll say that ther foreman has sent me after Young Wild West. Red kin wait behind ther patch of trees that's close to ther shack over there, so if it does happen that Young Wild West or any of 'em is there, he won't be seen. If we find they ain't there, he kin be on ther watch, an' then I'll wave my hand for him ter come on. There! I reckon it's all understood now. What we'll do when we git to ther house will be settled when we git there."

They now headed for the clump of trees that was near to the shack the cowboys occupied as a sleeping quarters.

Reaching it, Red Randy dismounted and remained there while the rest turned and rode toward the house.

They did not stop in the rear of it, but went on around to the front.

Under a tree sat Wing, the cook, dozing, and that was all they could see of anything like a human being.

But as they dismounted the woman servant came out and looked at them inquiringly.

"Is Young Wild West here?" asked Husker.

"No. He went away when ther boss an' his wife left," was the reply. "But it's putty near noon, so it won't be long afore he comes back."

The woman had scarcely spoken when Arietta came out, leading one of the children by the hand.

"Hello, miss," said Husker. "There's a little trouble among ther cows out on ther range, an' ther foreman sent us in ter tell Young Wild West ter come out."

"Well, he isn't here," Arietta answered, never once thinking that there was anything wrong.

"Ain't his pards here, either?"

"No, they went with him."

"Well, I reckon we'll have ter go an' hunt 'em up then, boys," and just then Husker stepped out where he knew he could be seen by Red Randy, and waved his hand.

Having done this, and seeing the villain approaching, he again turned to Arietta, and said:

"I s'pose it wouldn't be askin' too much if we asked for a drink of milk, miss?"

"Certainly not."

The girl turned to go inside so she could tell the servant what was wanted, and then Husker winked at his companion and called his hands softly together.

The milk was brought out to them just as Red Randy rode up.

Arietta happened to be standing in the broad hallway of the house, and the moment her eyes rested upon the villain she felt that something was wrong.

She ran quickly to the kitchen where Anna and Eloise were busy in preparing the dinner.

"Look out, girls!" she exclaimed. "I fear we are in danger. That bad man I saw peering through the bushes this morning is here, and he has five of the cowboys with him. I am satisfied that they are the ones Wild suspected as being villains."

Before the girls could make a reply heavy footsteps were heard, and then the six villains came rushing into the house.

Arietta promptly ran into the front room, her hand upon her revolver.

But she had hardly opened the door when she was seized by Red Randy and the weapon wrenched from her hand.

Then it was that she gave a scream, and her companions promptly joined in, including the two children, who were badly frightened.

"Stop that noise," thundered Husker. "Jest take it easy, gals, an' yer won't be hurt."

Anna and Eloise endeavored to get out of the house, but they were not quick enough, for the men got into the kitchen and quickly seized and overpowered them.

"I reckon we'd better tie their hands behind them, boys," said Husker. "Most likely they all know how ter shoot, an' we don't want ter run ther risk of gittin' any lead in us."

Two of the men hastened to do as he suggested.

Meanwhile Arietta was struggling in the grasp of Red Randy.

By a desperate effort she managed to free herself from him, and then she made a bolt for the door, eluding one of the men as he tried to catch her.

Around the house she ran, toward a little knoll, and then she turned her eyes in the direction she knew Wild and his partners would come from when they came to their dinner.

Much to her joy she saw some horsemen approaching, though they were nearly a mile away.

But she now found that the villains were after her, and just as the approaching horsemen disappeared from view behind a clump of woods close at hand, she made a bolt around to the rear of the house.

It was her intention to get back in the kitchen and get hold of a rifle she knew was there, but when she found one of the cowboys standing in the door ready to catch her, she came to a quick stop.

The others were right after her now, and seeing a ladder resting against the side of the building, she made a leap for it.

The next instant she was rapidly ascending it.

She could not help giving a cry of defiance as she reached the roof.

Then she seized the top rung of the ladder.

"Stop that, gal," cried Red Randy, angrily. "You may as well give in, 'cause you have got ter be my bride."

Arietta pulled up the ladder just as the villains reached the side of the building.

Baffled, they uttered cries of rage.

It was at that moment that Young Wild West came galloping to the scene.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

When Wild left his partners he was not long in making his way to the spot where the cowboys disappeared.

Confident that he was going to make an important discovery, the young deadshot hurried to the spot where the hanging vines concealed the entrance to the cave.

Though he knew there were six villains the other side of the vines, he did not hesitate to take hold of them and push them aside.

It was just as he thought. There was a cave, sure enough.

The voices of men came to his ears, too, so that meant that the villains were not far away.

The boy stepped stealthily into the opening, allowing the vines to drop gently into place.

Then he dropped to his hands and knees and crept in the direction the voices came from.

Twenty seconds later Young Wild West was looking at Red Randy as he sat upon a stone and told of his plan to steal Arietta.

Not more than five minutes could have elapsed between the time the last of the cowboys entered the cave and when our hero arrived.

This made it possible for him to hear all that was said.

It angered him somewhat to hear the words of the counsellors, but he kept perfectly silent and waited.

He felt a little kindly toward the man who objected to the plot, but when he found that he readily agreed to stick to Husker and the rest, he made up his mind that the fellow would have to take the consequences, the same as the rest did.

When Wild heard them getting their horses to leave the cave, he crept behind a rock, deciding to let them go out before he did.

Then he would quickly rejoin his partners and ride after the villains.

The boy wanted to give them a surprise, and that meant that great caution must be used in following them to the ranch.

Waiting until he heard them ride away, the young deadshot stepped to the vines that covered the entrance of the cave and pushed them aside.

He caught sight of them as they rode around a bend, and then he walked out and started for the place where he had left Charlie and Jim.

That they had seen the six horsemen leave the cave he felt certain, for they would surely keep a watch.

Wild had not covered more than a dozen yards when he looked up and saw Cheyenne Charlie waving to him.

The scout appeared to be very jubilant, so that meant that he surely had seen the villains go away from the cave.

Our hero was not long in joining his partners.

"Where are they goin', Wild?" the scout asked.

"They're going to the house for the purpose of robbing it and kidnapping the girls."

"What!" exclaimed Jim Dart, his face flushing angrily.

"Great gimlets!" cried Charlie. "So that's their game, is it?"

"That's just about the size of it, boys," the young deadshot answered, in his cool and easy way. "I got there just in time to hear them planning out what they meant to do. It appeared that Red Randy has fallen in love with Arietta. When he proposed to steal her Husker suggested that they take Anna and Eloise, too. There was only one man in the bunch who did not think well of this, but he was quickly overruled and gave in. Now, boys, the thing for us to do is to follow them, keeping out of their sight, and give them the surprise of their lives when they reach the ranch."

"Jest as you say, Wild. Though since we know jest what they're up ter, it seems to me it would be a good idea ter ride after 'em an' open fire on 'em. Ther quicker sich a gang as that is cleaned out ther better it will be."

"That may be true, Charlie, but we've no license for any such proceeding, you know. It will look much better if we should surprise them and catch them in the act of doing as they propose to. They will, of course, put up a fight, and then it will be proper for us to make short work of them."

"All right; I reckon you know best."

"That's the only way to do, in my way of thinking," declared Jim Dart.

They quickly mounted their horses, and then after taking a look at their surroundings, it was decided that they

scout rode off in a direction opposite to that taken by the bad man and the cowboys.

Though none of them knew much of the lay of the land in that vicinity, it occurred to them that they might be able to get around by proceeding along the other side of the ridge.

Having decided upon this plan of action, they at once rode off.

It was not long before they found a way to get to the top of the descent, and once there they quickly rode down to the other side, and then started in a direction that would finally bring them to the ranch house.

They rode hard now, for they knew they were going considerably out of their way, and that if they reached the ranch by the time the villains did they would have to hurry.

This proved to be the case, for when they had covered a couple of miles, and found that there was no way to make a short cut to the house, they began to fear that they might be too late.

But a quarter of a mile further on and they reached a spot from which they could see the house and other buildings plainly.

It was just then that the cowboys rode up to the door.

The distance to the house was not quite a mile, but our three friends could see them plainly.

"Come on, boys," said Wild. "We'll keep behind this strip of timber as long as we can. Then by making a dash across the open space over there we can get to that other little patch, which is pretty close to the house. I reckon we'll be in time, all right."

"You bet we will!" exclaimed the scout, as he gave the ends of his mustache a twist, which, by the way, was something that he generally did when a little excited.

They rode on, the sparse timber growth obstructing their view of the house for a minute or two.

It happened that they came in sight of it again just as Arietta broke away from her captor and ran outside.

Then it was that Young Wild West cried out for his partners to follow him at full speed.

He realized that his sweetheart was in danger of being roughly handled, if she had not already been.

The three were not long in reaching the scene, and, as has already been said, Wild came in view just as Arietta succeeded in pulling the ladder to the roof of the house.

So engrossed were the villains in their effort to recapture the girl that they failed to notice the approach of the three until they were within fifty yards of them.

Red Randy had made all sorts of threats to the girl in the space of a minute, and he had just informed her that if she did not come down inside of two minutes he would set fire to the house, when a cry from one of his companions told him that danger threatened.

Then he looked around and saw Young Wild West bearing toward the house at a swift gallop, his two partners close behind.

The villains were almost paralyzed with fear and surprise.

But Husker quickly recovered himself and called out, sharply:

"Get inside the house. It's our only chance."

He made a leap toward the door of the kitchen as he

spoke, but just then the sharp report of a rifle rang out and he fell to the ground.

It was Cheyenne Charlie who had fired the shot.

The rest started to run in all directions, some of them taking refuge behind a little out-house, from which they proceeded to fire shots that went anywhere close to our friends; for they were too excited to take any aim.

"Ride around the house in a circle, boys," said Wild. "We must do some shooting now, for the first thing we know a stray bullet will hit one of us. The scoundrels are putting up a fight."

Before they had made half the distance around the circle a shot was fired from a window of the house, and a bullet whizzed dangerously close to Wild's head.

But the boy did not intend to shoot at the house, for he knew that Anna and Eloise were inside.

Arietta was calmly sitting upon the roof, holding the ladder.

As she saw her dashing young lover riding up she waved her hat encouragingly to him.

It must have been that the villains thought the house was not so very safe for them, after all, for as our three friends got around to the other side of it they ran out to their horses.

Wild and his partners came in sight of them just as they were mounting.

Crang, crang, crang, crang!

Four shots were fired by them, and as many of the scoundrels dropped to the ground.

Red Randy alone was not hit, and as a last resort he left his horse and crawled under the low porch at the front of the house.

As Wild and his partners galloped up to the front of the house, Arietta dropped the ladder to the ground and quickly descended.

She ran around to him, and seeing the villains lying upon the ground, either dead or dying, she uttered a cry of delight.

"Oh, Wild!" she exclaimed. "You came just in time. They have got Anna and Eloise tied somewhere in the house. The servant is in a faint, I think, and the little children are nearly frightened to death."

The latter was certainly correct, for the screams of the youngsters could be heard quite plainly.

"Go inside and quiet them and set the girls free, Et," the boy answered. "Red Randy is under the stoop. We have got to get him out. I would like to take him alive, if possible."

"You'll never do that, Young Wild West," came from beneath the porch floor. "I'd rather be shot than hung. But look out how yer come for me, 'cause I'm a desperate man now. I'll shoot ther first one I see."

"Yer will, eh," retorted Cheyenne Charlie, hotly, as he placed his rifle to his shoulder.

There was a small knot-hole near the end of the stoop, and the scout was sure the voice came from that direction.

That the villain was looking through that knot-hole at the time he had no doubt.

He quickly drew a bead upon it and pulled the trigger. Crang!

A gurgling yell sounded from under the porch, and then

they all knew that Charlie's bullet had gone true to its mark.

"I reckon I fixed ther measly coyote," said Charlie, shrugging his shoulders and smiling grimly. "I knowed I wasn't mistaken about where ter shoot."

A couple of minutes later the girls came out of the house, leading the two children with them, who were now almost pacified, though still badly frightened.

The servant was not long in following them, for she had recovered from her swoon.

Meanwhile, Cheyenne Charlie took a look at the villains lying upon the ground.

He soon found that they were all dead save one, and this happened to be Husker.

He had been shot, and it was evident that he was bleeding inwardly.

"Can't yer do somethin' for me?" he pleaded, his face very pale, and the tears showing in his eyes. "I'm awful sorry I done this. I don't know what made me do it."

"I reckon there ain't no one as kin do much for you now, you sneakin' galoot," the scout declared. "But if it'll ease yer any, I'll git yer a drink of water."

Wild stepped up then, and he lifted the man's head so he could lie more comfortably.

He could tell that he had but a few minutes to live, and villain as the man was, he did not want him to suffer any more than was necessary.

"Husker, I knew you were a scoundrel almost the minute I first set eyes on you," said the young deadshot, looking the dying man squarely in the eyes. "I am so used to meeting such villains as you that I can size them up very quickly. Now then, if you have anything to say, you had better say it, for I must tell you that you have not long to live."

"I've been a very bad man, Young Wild West," said the cowboy, faintly. "I've done about everything that's bad and wicked in my life. I may as well tell yer that I was ther one as put up ther job ter steal Lively Rick's cattle, an' me an' my pards made quite a little money out of it since we've been here. I knowed putty well that our business wouldn't last long after you got here, so that's why I agreed ter help Red Randy kill yer an' ter steal ther gals. We had a snug little cave not far from here, and we meant ter take 'em there until we got a chance ter git away somewhere else with 'em."

"Yes, I know all about your cave," the young deadshot said, coolly. "I happened to be right in it at the time you were making your plans."

The dying man looked at him in surprise.

"Is that so, Young Wild West?" he queried.

"Yes, what I say is true. I was with my partners looking for Red Randy when we saw him go into the cave that was

covered by the hanging vines. While we were watching the spot you and your gang came along and entered also. Then in less than five minutes I was inside and listening to all that was said."

"Well, you know all about it, then, Young Wild West," and the dying man appeared to be relieved. "I'm mighty sorry I ever had anything ter do with this business. I hope I'll be forgiven. I—I——"

The man was taken with a bleeding at the mouth just then, and a minute or two later he expired in great agony.

Not only had Wild heard the confession from him, but his partners and Arietta, also, were at the spot and took in every word of it.

It appeared that Wing had fled from the spot when the cowboys awoke him from his doze, and he had made straight for the barn, where he found his brother Hop sleeping under the influence of the contents of a black bottle.

Where Hop had got the whisky no one knew, but it was quite evident that he had been looking around inside the house and had come across it.

Probably it was just as well that he was in the barn at the time, for the villains no doubt would have taken delight in riddling him with bullets if they had found him inside when they forced an entrance.

There is really nothing more to tell in connection with this story, but it will be well for us to state that Young Wild West ran the ranch to his own satisfaction, and also to the owner's; and when Lively Rick and Nevada Kate returned to Carson City, something like ten thousand dollars richer than when they went away, they were pleased at the way things had been conducted, even though the five new hands had been wiped out.

That it was a game fight that Arietta had put up when the villains made their raid upon the house, everyone admitted, and the girl was given much credit for the way she had acted.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND 'CHAPPARAL CHICK'; OR, THE BANDITS OF THE FOOTHILLS," which will be the next number (406) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

The extent to which rivalry between merchants may go was never better illustrated than in a fight for trade several years ago between two clothing dealers in the cheap business section of Pittsburgh. These men were business neighbors and mortal enemies. Things had gone from bad to worse between them, and neither overlooked a single opportunity to get the better of his rival. After two weeks of particularly heated competition, during which placards on the front of the shops contained direct insults to each other, one of the dealers arrayed a young man in one of his suits of clothes, caused him to stand in front of his store, and demonstrated with a garden hose that rain could not "shrink or fade" the garments he offered for sale. A barker in his employ dared his rival to submit his clothes to a similar test. As a matter of fact, the suit used for demonstration purposes had been chemically treated.

The largest butterfly known is found only in British New Guinea and specimens are worth anywhere from \$100 upward. The male measures eight inches across the wings and the female not less than eleven inches, a wing spread exceeding that of many small birds. The story of the first discovery of this gigantic butterfly is a curious one. A naturalist saw a specimen perched on the top of a tree and failing to capture it by any other means finally shot it. From the fragments he decided that the species was entirely unknown to science and he forthwith fitted out an expedition at a cost of many thousands of dollars to go in search of the insects. Two members of the party fell victims to the Papuan cannibals and another was rescued only in the nick of time. Spite of this inauspicious commencement to his enterprise, however, the naturalist persevered and ultimately succeeded in obtaining perfect specimens.

"Railways in the West are preparing to build immense snowsheds of concrete this summer wherever there is a possibility of a repetition of the recent disastrous snowslides on lines in the West, when trains were swept from their tracks, killing scores of passengers," said Henry Gruber, an engineer of the Northern Pacific Railway. "The Northern Pacific has many dangerous passes in the Cascade and Rocky Mountains, where snowslides are a constant menace in winter to the passenger traffic. There are many similar danger spots along the line of the Canadian Pacific. At most of these places the railways have long wooden snowsheds, but these have not proved effective in preventing accidents. In many cases avalanches

and immense snowslides have swept these structures completely away, though they were built of the most massive timbers that could be obtained. The roads have learned that wooden structures won't do, so this summer all these snowsheds are to be replaced with great concrete structures which will be built so strong and enduring that even a cyclone would not be able to budge them. People in the East who have never seen one of the snowstorms of the Rocky Mountains have no idea of the immense mass of snow that covers everything, and they cannot conceive of the violence of an avalanche."

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

Johnson—That girl is a jewel. Morrison—Why don't you marry her?" Johnson—I can't furnish the setting.

"And do you think, doctor, you will like me?" "My dear madam, I want to marry your daughter only that I may have you as my mother-in-law."

Maud—So he had the cheek to ask my age, did he? Well, what did you tell him? Ethel—I told him I didn't know positively, but I thought you were just twenty-four on your thirtieth birthday."

"I find it harder and harder to live within my means." "That ought to be easy enough. What I'm trying to do is to live within the means my wife is endeavoring to make the public believe we have."

Mark Twain told how he once patronized the mother of a family in Hannibal, Mo. "So this is a little girl eh?" I said to her as she displayed her children to me. "And this sturdy little urchin in the bib belongs, I suppose, to the contrary sex?" "Yassah," the woman replied. "Yassah, dat's a girl, too."

A professional ball catcher in Pittsburg wagered ten dollars that he could catch any ball thrown to him, no matter how curved or swiftly it was sent. The person who bet with him paralyzed him by standing a young woman before him to pitch. She had never handled a ball before, but in three pitches she put so many curves to the ball that he has been almost cross-eyed ever since. He failed to be within ten feet of the sphere when it came in his direction.

Mr. Johnston was injudicious enough to enter the parlor one evening without giving any warning of his approach. The consequence was that he found his daughter and her sweetheart occupying one chair. "Mr. Brown," said he severely, "when I was courting Mrs. Johnston she sat one side of the room and I sat on the other." "Ah," said the daughter's admirer warmly, "that's exactly what I should have done if I had been courting Mrs. Johnston."

A new boy had made his appearance in the schoolroom, and Miss Adair, the teacher, summoned him to her desk. "Do you expect to come to school here regularly?" she asked him. "Yes'm." "Where do you live? Are you in this district?" "I guess so. I live down this street 'bout four blocks." "What is your name?" "Martin Luther Hicks." "Martin Luther?" said the teacher. "I presume, Martin, you know for whom you were named?" "Yes'm," answered the boy, brightening up. "I was named after me uncle on me mother's side. He keeps a liv'ry stable."

DONALD FENTON'S LEAP

By KIT CLYDE.

"Above all things, Donald, as long as you remain in Ferndale, have nothing to do with any of the Dunstons. Do not recognize or speak to any of the hated tribe, at the risk of arousing my anger. That is all the order I give you. Amuse yourself as you see fit, but go not near that detested family, or——"

The sentence remained unfinished, but the stern look upon his father's face warned Donald Fenton that it would be dangerous to disobey the injunction.

"Do you still cherish the same hard feelings you did previous to my departure for Europe?"

"Time can never efface the memory of a wrong as great as mine, and during the ten years you have been away from me I have never forgotten, never forgiven it, and I never shall. That's a beautiful beast of yours in the stable. I admire not only your good taste in selecting, but your good fortune in securing so beautiful an animal."

"Ah, Midnight well deserves your praise."

"Better give her a chance to show her fine qualities in a dash over the Ferndale hills. Don't take the north road."

"Why not?"

"Because I bid you. Zounds! must I be questioned at every turn? Away with you! I shall be busy till dinner."

The old man's manner most unmistakably intimating that the conference was at an end, Donald turned on his heel and left the library, whistling a popular air and thrashing his boot with his riding-whip.

"So the old sore is not healed up, and the Fentons and the Dunstons, although living within a few miles of each other, must still treat each other as if they didn't exist. It's outrageous, and I dare swear my father has long ago forgotten in what the miserable quarrel originated."

He was by this time on the lawn, and gazed about himself listlessly, taking little note of the lovely surroundings. The house and grounds of Ferndale were situated on the summit of a rocky hill, sparsely wooded, from which the surrounding country for miles could be viewed. Below it lay a deep valley, through which ran a road leading to a village some five miles distant. At a point about two miles, in the other direction, a branch road started.

This led to the Dunston estate, and was called the North Road. No one in the employ of old Richard Fenton was ever allowed to set foot upon it, and if any one of the private roads belonging to Fenton were ever trespassed upon by any of the Dunstons, whether of the family or of the dependents thereof, the matter was not lightly passed over.

Innumerable lawsuits took place between the families, in which first one and then the other came off victorious. They were always appealed, no matter what the expense, and many were the large fees paid to eminent lawyers by the irate heads of these irascible families.

Nor was the law always resorted to. Many and fierce were the encounters between the "hands" of the respective families, who ably imitated the example set them by the "heads." Nobody knew how the feud began; it was an affair of many years' standing, and had been handed down to each successive generation.

Donald Fenton was the only remaining child of his father, and ever since a boy of nine years he had been in Europe, studying and traveling, and helping to spend his father's money. He had but an indistinct remembrance of the feud,

but even as a child he had considered it not only foolish, but wicked.

On his return home, a year or so after his mother's death, he was both grieved and annoyed to learn that the old difficulty still existed, and he determined to put an end to it, come what might.

As he stood on the lawn, gazing far away upon the blue outlines of the distant hills, the dark green of the tops of the trees in the gully, and the few fleecy clouds, glorified by the afternoon sun, the neigh of a horse sounded upon his ear and disturbed his reverie.

"Aha, my darling, I had forgotten you. Ho, Michael!" he called, to a man who was just passing a few rods off. "Saddle Midnight for me in a jiffy; I'm off for a scamper among the hills."

"Faix, I will, jist, Master Don. The black beauty is cryin' to get out."

And the man hastened away, and presently returned with one of the most beautiful black mares that ever was shod.

Her hair was jet black and glossy, without the least tiny speck of white or gray about it. She was clean of limb, sound of wind, and could keep a pace for miles and miles that would kill an ordinary animal. Her eye was as soft and tender as a woman's, but with a latent fire withal, that on occasion could kindle into a glance as fierce and fiery as a demon's. She was well cared for, and never did two beings love each other more fondly than she and her young master.

She gave a glad neigh as he approached, and pawed the ground impatiently with her beautiful foot, and by other signs showed her eagerness to indulge in a lively canter, a long, swinging trot, or a furious gallop. Donald sprang upon her back lightly, thrust his feet into the stirrups, and away darted the enchanting animal, and in a few seconds both horse and man were lost to sight among the trees.

The young man had ridden for two or three miles without taking particular notice of the direction, so occupied was he with his thoughts and the pleasure caused by the exhilarating exercise, when suddenly, as he was turning into a cross-road, which seemed by its lovely surroundings to afford a fit place for meditation, a strange figure rushed out and attempted to seize Midnight by the bridle.

"Hold! Dare to go further at your peril!" shrieked the figure, which was that of an old man, scantily clad in coarse, faded garments. "This is no place for the heir of Ferndale."

"Let go of my horse. Who are you?"

"The avenging angel of the house of Dunston! Yet would I spare you," added the singular being, whose mind appeared to Donald to be affected. "You are a comely youth, and a noble——" he continued, in a softer tone, as he stepped aside, "and maybe it is your mission to unite the families so long at war, and end this terrible feud."

"End it I will if it is in any man's power to do it," answered Donald.

"Go thy way then, but beware of enemies. Know you not that this is the North Road?"

"I care not what road it is so long as it pleases me," giving his horse the rein. "On, my good Midnight."

"Stay a moment; there is danger ahead."

"I fear it not; here is for your trouble," throwing him a silver dollar as he passed rapidly by.

"Silver!" muttered the old man as he picked it up. "Aha, there is a charm in silver. Maybe the end is coming after all. We shall see—we shall see. He seemed a manly youth, verily."

It will be well to mention, in passing, that the old man had, when a youth of Donald's age, been struck on the head with a stone in an altercation between the tenants of the rival houses, and had been rendered partially insane. He had for years styled himself the "Avenging Angel," and many were

the fights he led in person, displaying great valor, and though frequently defeated, he was constantly planning new methods of harassing Mr. Fenton and the men in his employ.

Donald kept on at a good pace, the road rising at every step, when suddenly from behind a clump of trees three mounted laborers dashed out and furiously attacked him.

The boy drew his riding-whip, and slashed vigorously about him, hitting one across the face with the stinging lash, and reversing his weapon dealt one a stunning blow on the shoulder with the heavily loaded stock, laming his arm, and bestowing on the third, who approached too near, a crack between the eyes that temporarily blinded him.

He rode up the hill, and before long he could see the towers of a splendid mansion rising over the tops of the trees, and in a few moments dashed into a broad avenue lined with noble trees. On either side was a high wall of hewn stone broken at intervals with buttresses, pillars rising above the main line, on top of which were vases of choice flowers.

On one side of the road was a deep mountain lake, with steep banks.

As Donald approached he saw three ladies evidently in great distress, wringing their hands and uttering agonizing shrieks.

"Oh, save her—save her!" the foremost one cried, as she saw him.

He looked, and there in the waters of the lake was a beautiful young girl struggling frantically to save herself, and crying for help.

Donald seated himself as firmly as a rock in his saddle, tightened his grip on the reins, and dashing the spurs into Midnight's foam-flecked sides, urged the noble steed forward, with a snort of intelligence, made a flying leap over the moat and wall, and struck the water not far from the drowning girl.

It was but a moment's effort to seize the arm of the young lady as horse and rider went down, and when they arose again she was on the saddle with our hero, who guided Midnight to a spot where the bank was less precipitous, and in a short time all three were once more safe on land.

"How shall we ever thank you?" said the lady who had first attracted Donald's attention. "Tell us the name of her preserver?"

"I am named Fenton."

At these words Blanche fainted.

Donald quickly caught her in his arms, and the house now being in plain sight, strode rapidly up the path with his inanimate burden, and reached the wide veranda just as a portly, white-haired old gentleman emerged from the house.

"I have heard of your noble conduct, young gentleman, from one who saw you make the leap and came at once to acquaint me with the facts. I can never repay you for this; but you must at least enter and change your saturated garments. Here, Lizzie, Martha, Abigail, somebody, attend to your mistress. Tell me your name, young gentleman, that I may know to whom I am indebted for this great benefaction?"

"My name is Donald Fenton."

"The heir of Ferndale?"

"The same, and you are——"

"Gabriel Dunston!" shrieked the old man, in a towering passion. "How dare you trespass upon my grounds?"

Donald waited to hear no more, but raised his arm to beat his defamer to the earth with the insulting taunts still on his lips, when a charming young lady, dressed in a soft, fleecy white robe, with a blush-rose at her throat, and her raven hair falling loose upon her snowy shoulders, rushed between him and Dunston, and held out her hands to stay the blow.

"Spare him, Donald Fenton, for my sake. You have saved my life, and I thank you. My father knows not what he says. By and by he will repent his rashness."

The old man's face was a livid purple; the great veins on

his neck and temples swelled like whipcords, his eyes protruded, and a cold, clammy sweat moistened his leaden brow. He reeled like a drunken man, and catching wildly at the air, fell with a heavy thud upon the piazza.

"Help! Help! My father has had a stroke of apoplexy! Oh, why did this ever happen?" cried the grief-stricken girl, bending over the death-like form of her father, loosening his cravat and fanning his forehead.

Several hired men approached, and Mr. Dunston was carried into the house, still insensible.

Donald then left.

When he reached the spot where he had left Midnight, he found traces of a struggle, but could see nothing of the animal.

He walked on as rapidly as his wet garments would allow, and soon emerged from the North Road into the main thoroughfare.

About an hour afterward he was entering the gate at Ferndale, and was congratulating himself upon getting in unobserved, when Michael saw him, and ran up to him with a glad cry.

"Oh, Master Don, you're a sight that's good for sore eyes! Sure, we thought you were killed when the poor horse came running in an hour ago, all wet and the saddle-girths broken and covered with blood, and she herself with a bad cut in her side, the poor darling. Sure, your father took on mighty bad when he saw it, and I fear it's killed him. He's very low, the doctor says."

"It must have been those men of Dunston's that cut the saddle."

"Oh, dear, war ye up to that ould viper's? The master thought as much, and wanted to go and avenge ye, and then he was struck all of a heap like and fainted, and they do say he's not likely to recover. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what'll we do?"

Donald hastily donned a dry suit of clothes and went to his father's room. The door was guarded by an assistant of the doctor's.

"May I go in? I must see him and tell him I am safe."

"I am afraid not; however, I will ask Dr. Black."

The quick ears of the dying man caught the tones of his son's voice, and he raised himself up in bed and commanded them to let Donald enter.

"Don, my boy, thank heaven you are safe! You gave me a great fright. What happened?"

"I saved Dunston's daughter from drowning, sir, and his men drove my horse away and cut her, and old Dunston threatened to hang me. Oh, father, don't go yet."

Richard Fenton threw his arms around Donald's neck, and said, faintly:

"Don, my boy, you have done your duty. Tell Dunston I forgive him—good-by—Heaven bless you!"

The grasp relaxed, the eyes closed, there was a brief struggle, and when Donald laid the beloved form back on the pillow, life was extinct. The old man, forgiving at last, had entered into eternity.

At about the same moment Gabriel Dunston succumbed to the dread disease which had threatened his life; and the harvest-moon, as it rose in all its glory, and bathed those two mansions with its silvery light, saw the head of each household a lifeless corpse, and the heir and heiress bowed in unspeakable grief.

With the death of both of the heads of these families the feud ended.

A year more and the two estates were joined, and Donald Fenton was the master of both, and with his sweet wife, Blanche, gave the country folks from all the country as hearty and sincere a welcome to the marriage-feast as kind hearts could make it; and where before only bitter feelings had existed, now stood the heaven-born, radiant figures of "Peace and Love," and "joy was all over the land."

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